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**FIELD-MARSHAL EARL HAIG**



EARL HAIG

*From the painting by Sir James Guthrie, LL.D., P.R.S.A., reproduced by kind permission of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Fife.*

# FIELD-MARSHAL EARL HAIG

BY

BRIGADIER - GENERAL  
JOHN CHARTERIS

C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P.

*Bt. Col. Legion of Honour,  
Commander of Order of the Couronne (Belgium),  
Rising Sun of Japan,  
Croix de Guerre,  
American Distinguished Service Cross*

WITH A FOREWORD

by

JOHN BUCHAN

With 8 Half-Tone Plates and numerous Line Engravings



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## FOREWORD

GENERAL CHARTERIS had the privilege of serving with Lord Haig in India and at Aldershot, and for the whole of the Great War with the exception of the last two months. During the Battle of the Somme I had the privilege of serving under General Charteris. When, in 1921, the *Official History* was taking shape, Sir J. E. Edmonds asked Lord Haig whom he would like to go through it on his behalf, with special reference to the work of the I Corps, the answer was: "Send it to Charteris. He knows as much about it as I do."

This book is therefore a study of Lord Haig's career by one who was himself a sharer in its most momentous stages. It is also a study of a famous soldier by one who brings to the task not only a knowledge of war, but the understanding born of a deep affection. A great man, especially a great man of action, is apt to appear before the world as a combination of abstract powers and virtues, impressive like a statue set up in some public place, but a little remote from our common life. Lord Haig was so rich in character and talents that many books will be written about him, for in the words of the German philosopher, "the compulsion which a great man lays upon the world is to try to understand him." Future historians will discuss every detail of his campaigns, and every aspect of his genius. But in the meantime the world has cause to be grateful, I think, to General Charteris for providing these *mémoires pour servir*—a personal narrative of how Lord Haig appeared to a colleague and a friend.

JOHN BUCHAN.



## PREFACE

IT was my good fortune to be most closely associated with Lord Haig, during the years which he spent in India, as Chief of the General Staff, in command of the troops at Aldershot, and the critical years of the Great War.

From the earliest days of our association I was deeply impressed with the greatness of his mind and character, and both for this reason, and in the ordinary discharge of my duties, I preserved careful records of all the important incidents and conversations. I have drawn freely on these papers in the preparation of this book.

Subsequent to the Peace, we corresponded frequently, and on more than one occasion he asked me to assist him in the preparation of work which was required of him. At one of the last interviews which I had with him, he discussed with me the desirability of publishing to the world his views on the great events of the War, with particular reference to the controversies which had from time to time arisen. As is well known, he has deposited important documents in the safe custody of the Trustees of the British Museum, which are not likely to be published for a considerable time. In the book which I have now written I have made no attempt to anticipate the publication of these documents, which will, presumably, in due course, be given to the world, but it is well that those who took part in the great struggle under his leadership, and those who lived

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through the times of crisis, should have some idea of the magnitude of the task which he undertook, of the great qualities of his character, and of the debt which Great Britain and Europe owe to his efforts. It is for that purpose that I have undertaken this work. It can be but a forerunner of the publication of his own letters and diary.

Almost all the documents to which I have referred during the years 1907-1918 passed through my hands, and are now in the official archives. All the conversations which I have reported were either in my own presence, or were related to me by Lord Haig himself. In the preparation of the book I have used all available published data. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my debt to the following books :

“Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914-1918,” by Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson.

“My War Memories, 1914-1918,” by General Ludendorff.

“Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson,” by Major-General Callwell.

“The World Crisis,” by Mr. Winston S. Churchill.

“The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent,” by Maj.-Gen. Sir F. Maurice.

“Sir Douglas Haig’s Command, 1915-1918,” by Dewar and Boraston.

“Earl Haig,” by Ernest Protheroe.

“Lord Haig,” by Sir George Arthur.

*The British Legion Journal*, Memorial Issue.

I am also indebted to Captain John Haig for much valuable information regarding the earlier years of his great brother, and to General Sir A. Hamilton Gordon, and General Sir

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Spencer Ewart. My thanks are also due to my Secretary, Miss Sheila Hardie, who gave me devoted service in the preparation of the manuscript and in the correction of proofs. In every difficulty I have received unstinted and most valuable help from my friend Mr. J. H. Lepper, without whose advice I could not have completed my task. Finally, I acknowledge with the deepest gratitude the assistance which I have received throughout from my wife.

J. CHARTERIS.

*House of Commons,*  
*4th Feb., 1929.*



# FIELD-MARSHAL EARL HAIG

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY DAYS

EDINBURGH has given birth to many whose names are inscribed on the roll of fame. Philosophers, poets, men of science, men of affairs have all owned as their birthplace the capital of Scotland, yet she has singularly few great soldiers among her sons. Neither the Napoleonic Wars nor the long series of small wars of the 19th century bring to mind any Edinburgh name renowned in military history. For her deficiency in this respect Edinburgh more than atoned on June 19th, 1861, when in one of her dignified squares Rachel, wife of John Haig of Cameron Bridge, gave birth to Douglas Haig.

Pride of ancestry is not a general characteristic of the Lowland Scot. More often there is found in that dour, determined and ambitious folk a pride that from small beginnings great position has been achieved. "No man," said a distinguished Scottish dominie of the 19th century, "who does not add lustre to his name and pedigree should mention either." When the world had no further honours to offer Douglas Haig he referred with pride and affection to the records of his forbears, and it was at Bemersyde that he took up his permanent abode: but when his task was still before him he rarely mentioned either his family or the Borders. Yet it was a family in which anyone could justly take pride. Legend connects it back to the Picts—more reliable records



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show Haigs of Bemersyde, a family of Norman origin, on the banks of the Tweed in the 12th century, with Petrus de Haga as the head of the family. In its early stages it was a family of warriors. There were Haigs in the Crusades, Haigs at Bannockburn, Haigs at Flodden Field. Later, more peaceful pursuits claimed their descendants, but the family still remained prominent in the records of the Borders and of Scotland. It was a Haig who, as Solicitor-General, drew up the supplication of the Scottish Estates against Episcopal domination. There was a Haig, laird of Bemersyde, who espoused the beliefs of the Quakers and suffered five years' imprisonment in the Tollbooth of Edinburgh. There was a Haig risking and losing all for the Young Pretender.

But the connection of Douglas Haig with the Haigs of Bemersyde, though direct, was remote. His father, John Haig, was sixth in descent from Robert Haig, the second son of the 17th Laird of Bemersyde. Nor was the family's association with Edinburgh more than fortuitous. John Haig (as the requirements of the education of his family pressed on him) had taken a flat in Charlotte Square, and as the family increased in numbers he had found it necessary to acquire the whole of No. 24, Charlotte Square, where Douglas Haig, the youngest son, was born.\* John Haig himself, however, lived little in Edinburgh. He was a Fife man, proud of his home in the Kingdom, and with little liking even for those restrained excitements and amusements offered by life in Edinburgh in the second half of the 19th century. Nor was his health robust during the later years of his life. He suffered severely from asthma, which forced him to spend some of his time abroad. He saw little of his youngest son, and his death in 1878 left no great blank in Douglas Haig's life.

The influence of his mother was greater. She had married when only eighteen years of age. After the birth of her

\* The other members of the family were: William Henry, married Emily Newman and died in 1884; Mary Elizabeth, married General George Depree and died in 1918; Hugh Veitch, married Anne Lindesay Fraser and died in 1902; Janet, married Charles Edwin Haig and died in 1925; Henrietta Frances, married William G. Jameson and died in 1928; John Atreus, married Jessie Marion Pembroke; and George Ogilvy, married Augusta V. Drayton and died in 1905.

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first son she withdrew almost entirely from the outside world and devoted her life to her children. She heard their prayers night and morning until her death in 1879. The strict and high principles of Douglas Haig's early manhood and middle age and the deep religion of his later years sprang from the seeds sown by his mother in his childhood. She remained in Douglas's mind as a vision of singular beauty and sweetness of character; her picture stood above his bed at Bemersyde during the last years of his life. She died when he was still in his teens, and after her death the home influence, which plays so large a part in the moulding of character, was exerted by his elder sister, Henrietta, afterwards Mrs. Jameson. It was in her house that he drew his last breath.\*

Between these two—brother and sister—there existed throughout the whole of Haig's life a very remarkable bond of comradeship and affection. Henrietta was much more than a sister; until his marriage, she was the only woman to whom Haig ever gave a thought: she was his confidante and adviser. It was she who turned his mind and inclination to the Army, when both Public School and University had failed to provide him with any definite aspiration for a career, and when there was a grave risk that this man—destined to play so great a part in the history of the world—would spend his life in idleness.

The early years of Haig's life present no remarkable picture. As a child he was headstrong, bad-tempered and intractable. He invariably wore the kilt, and as a minor punishment the drum which was his most treasured plaything bore an inscription in bold lettering: "*Douglas Haig—sometimes a good boy.*" It might be possible to trace his abiding love for horses to the fact that as a baby he was not allowed the comfort and ease of a perambulator, but made his earliest journeys in a panner on a pony's back.

Were it not that children whose subsequent careers lead them far from battlefields have often shown a similar idiosyncrasy, a connection between the inclinations of childhood and the life of a soldier might be traced to a childish incident

\* Henrietta Jameson survived Douglas Haig by only a few months.

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when he refused to be photographed until he was allowed to hold a pistol in his hand.

We leave his childhood's days with a picture in our minds of a small bad-tempered bekilted child, with a crop of bright yellow curls—of which his elder brothers, after the manner of their kind and to the distress of his mother, prematurely deprived him—secured to a pannier on a pony, and bearing in his hands the drum with the inscription, “Douglas Haig—*sometimes* a good boy.”

In May, 1869, before he was eight years of age, his father had to go abroad for his health, and Douglas joined his elder brother as a boarder in Mr. Bateson's school at Clifton Bank, St. Andrews. But his stay there was of short duration, and in October of the same year he and his brother John were sent to Edinburgh.

By this time his father had given up the house in Charlotte Square, and Douglas, with his elder brother, was lodged with a Miss Hebburn at Castle Terrace, and attended the Edinburgh Collegiate School in Charlotte Square. The atmosphere in Miss Hebburn's house was austere puritanical. Each day at family prayers she petitioned that a new theatre near her home might be “brought to nought,” and each Sunday the boys had to listen to an hour's sermon. Cause and effect are difficult to connect. The theatre eventually failed and was bought up by the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, and the two Haig boys left with a strong disinclination for religious ministrations—a disinclination which in the case of Douglas Haig lasted until in the Great War he suddenly found a source of renewed strength and consolation in the sermons of another minister of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

From the school at Charlotte Square, Douglas Haig passed to Mr. Hanbury's preparatory school in Warwickshire. He had been destined for Rugby, but (as so often happens in the case of men who achieve great things in later life) his mental development had been slow, and eventually he was sent to Clifton, as a school better suited to his classical attainments.

Haig's time at Clifton was short, and he does not appear

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to have made his mark in any way on his Public School. He entered at the age of fourteen and left while still a few months short of eighteen years of age. A contemporary records his impressions of "a quiet determined youngster, whose clean appearance was merely an anticipation of the day when he became the smartest of smart cavalry officers." and of "one of the keenest and hardest-working forwards in the School House team." His only recorded speech in the School Debating Society was to propose a motion that "The Army had done the country more service than the Navy." Neither his school-fellows nor his masters discerned in the boy any indication of those qualities which were to make him an outstanding figure in history. Haig himself, while he retained an affectionate interest in his old school, brought from it no abiding friendship, and none too high an opinion of public-school education. Perhaps the most permanent impression that Clifton left on his mind was provided by the school motto, "*Spiritus intus alit.*" "The Spirit that quickeneth" was throughout Haig's life one of the mottoes most frequently on his lips, as it was one of the deepest of his convictions. Already at Clifton he was developing that quality of "aloneness" which was so prominent a characteristic of his later life. He was his own judge, his own taskmaster; he set the standard for himself, and he did not allow himself to be deflected by a hair's-breadth from his intentions or to be swayed by the opinions of others.

One of the last actions of his life was to set his signature to a letter composed by Sir Henry Newbolt, and signed by five distinguished Old Cliftonians: Haig, Sir Herbert Warren, Mr. J. H. Whitley (late Speaker of the House of Commons), Sir Henry Newbolt, and Sir Francis Younghusband. The letter runs: ". . . We look with pride on the spirit and success of the younger generations, and we are moved with a strong desire to send them a message out of the past, in the hope that our experience of life may perhaps here and there lighten a difficulty or confirm a faith. . . . Life has become more controversial; controversy is more violent; the unintelligent are perverting science into a new form of superstition; religion is in danger of being crushed out between the

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materialistic selfishness of the rich and luxurious and the materialistic hopes of the overworked and underpaid. . . . In the last forty or fifty years we have lived through times of great national prosperity and still greater danger and anxiety. These years have convinced us all that no kind of life is complete, no kind of life can make the world intelligible or give us any lasting satisfaction, unless there enters into it the element which is called Religion. We are not speaking of this or that form of religion, but of the impulse which is expressed in all such forms; the desire to find God in the universe and to understand our relation to Him. . . . Guidance and lasting satisfaction are, as we believe, to be found only in faith—in the assurance that the life of man progresses by conformity with a Universal Spirit and a divine beauty of character; so that every act and preference of every one of us is of immortal consequence, because it either helps or hinders the realization of the order which God is perpetually designing for the world.”

A visit of the Prince of Wales to Clifton had brought together at the College four of these distinguished Old Cliftonians, and a discussion arose between them on school life. Sir Henry Newbolt was absent, but on Haig's suggestion it was decided to ask him to associate himself with the four old boys present, and to draft this letter embodying their views on the requirements of school education, which might be of service to future generations of boys. It may be that when Haig suggested and signed the letter his mind went back to his own school days, and that it was the recollection of how little he had carried away from school which prompted him to try and provide for others the ideals which he himself had failed to acquire.

Certainly there is no evidence that he took from Clifton to Brasenose College, Oxford (which he entered in 1880), any deep religious conviction, or any aspiration after a life higher than that of the ordinary freshman. Nor did Brasenose supply the deficiency. He spent three years at Oxford, but the atmosphere was not congenial. Life still held no object for him. He did not shirk his studies, but they failed to interest him. His mind was essentially a practical one. He

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could work devotedly and assiduously in pursuit of an object that was well defined and clear to him, but the search after knowledge for knowledge's sake made no appeal.

In later years he used to refer to the scholar who studied without some practical purpose as the goal of his effort, with slight contempt, as a "pundit" or a "scribe," and he cherished the deepest contempt for examinations as a test of ability. His life at Oxford afforded him only a suitable background in which he could excel at games and study his fellow-undergraduates. He distinguished himself at polo. He played for Oxford in the University match of 1882, but in academic learning he made no attempt to shine.

Illness in the summer of 1881 prevented his fulfilment of the University residential qualification, and made him ineligible for a degree within three years; but this weighed little with him, for he still had no purpose. Apart from polo, sport made little appeal to him. He played some desultory golf, but without either aptitude or keenness. He shot and hunted, but rather to gain further experiences than because of any pleasure afforded to him.

Although he left Oxford without regret, his College,\* like his school, retained a place in his affections throughout his life. He seldom re-visited his old College, but he kept in close touch with it. In 1908 Brasenose conferred on him the title of Gentleman Commoner, and in 1915 he was elected to an Honorary Fellowship.

We can picture him at the end of his Oxford course as a young man—strikingly handsome, almost dandified in appearance—rather discontented and purposeless; self-contained and very reserved, though still liable to sudden fits of passion; uncertain of what the future might hold for him, and handicapped by the lack of a permanent home and by inadequate private means. Oxford had given him one friend only, the son of a Hampshire landowner, a friendship which lasted far into his later life. He had no women friends: women neither interested nor attracted him.

If his destiny had been to devote himself to active religious

\* Visitor to Oxford will find his rooms at Brasenose on the right of the ground-floor passage, beneath the sundial in the Old Quadrangle.

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work, his biographer would have said that when he left Oxford he was "awaiting his call;" but the sharp transition from a civilian to a military career was not the result of any call. There was no deep impulse either of ambition or even of inclination. At the time a story was current that he sat for the Army Examination as the result of a bet that he would not be able to pass without special preparation; but the story is apocryphal.

Destiny worked through his sister Henrietta's influence. She had striven to induce the elder brother, John Haig, to adopt a military career, and had failed. Apparently she decided to transfer her efforts to the younger brother; and Douglas Haig, still purposeless, agreed, though without enthusiasm, to enlarge his experience by at least a few years of military life. He sat for, and passed, the examination as a University candidate for the Army, and, as was then the custom for those who sought to exchange the student's gown for the soldier's tunic, entered Sandhurst as a cadet in 1883. And at Sandhurst, for the first time, ambition stirred in Haig's breast. It is not easy to trace the cause. He had not then any aspiration to fame as a soldier. The Army itself either as a profession or as a means of service to his country made no special appeal to him. But at Sandhurst, from the moment of entrance, he found himself for the first time in his life prominent among his fellows.

He was—by virtue of his University career—senior to the other cadets in years. His studies, if desultory, had ranged over a wider field. In the world of sport he had already adventured, where his fellow-cadets were still awaiting opportunity. He decided that it would be ignominious to lose this ascendancy, and he set himself resolutely to the task of maintaining his leadership.

He shared a room with one who was later to be a Corps Commander under him in France, the late General Sir Walter Congreve, V.C., who bore witness to the resolute application that Haig devoted to his studies. Already he had begun to parcel out his day to a fixed time-table. The leisure hours, free from official lectures and drills, were rigidly apportioned. Haig was determined that he would leave Sandhurst

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first in every branch of the little world of the Royal Military College, and this—his earliest ambition—he achieved.

He left Sandhurst first in order of merit, with the Anson Memorial Sword as Senior Under Officer, and with a high athletic record. Twice in Haig's early career the definite prophecy was made by those under whom he served that he would be supreme in the Army. At Sandhurst one of the instructors was asked which of the cadets gave greatest promise for the future, and replied: "A Scottish lad, Douglas Haig, is top in almost everything—books, drill, riding and sports: he is to go into the cavalry, and, before he is finished, he will be top of the Army."

It was the capacity to work and the character of the young man that impressed the instructor rather than any flash of genius, and his fellow-cadets did not share the conviction of the instructor. He was envied rather than admired. He was appreciated but not popular. His determination to excel had intensified his "aloneness." His success and the strict discipline that he exacted as Under Officer had given him the semblance of arrogance. He was not apt in conversation, and his shyness, carefully concealed, was mistaken for conceit. He left Sandhurst as he entered it, without any close friendship for any of his contemporaries: but Sandhurst taught complete self-control. The exercise of authority forced him to master his outbursts of passion, and though he was never at any time until the last few years of his life free from gusts of anger, he had learnt both the necessity and the value of strict control of their expression.

Within a few months of his departure from Sandhurst Douglas Haig received his first commission,\* in the 7th Hussars. Sandhurst had whetted his desire for success, and he sought and found considerable scope for activity in the somewhat easy-going life of a cavalry regiment of the time. It is not unfair to say that at this period the mind of the typical cavalry officer turned more freely to sport than to professional studies. The purely routine work of administration was generally left to the admirable Warrant and Non-commissioned officers. Polo filled a larger portion of the

\* 7th Feb. 1885.



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horizon of the commissioned ranks than did the study of the art of war.

Haig, although he took his place at once in the regimental polo team (which was then the crack team in India), still rigidly apportioning his time, found ample opportunity for enlarging his knowledge and experience. He studied and learnt the minutiae of regimental administration. He re-organized the regimental canteen. Within three years he was appointed adjutant, and at this time he made his first adventure in authorship—a short and quite unoriginal brochure on Explosives and Demolitions, published in 1891. He spent long hours in studying French and German, though without acquiring fluency in either language, but he had not yet begun to study either the science of war or military history.

The borders of India attracted him, and he spent his first long leave in a tour round the remote frontiers of Khelat and Baluchistan. Yet all these pursuits, though somewhat unusual, were by no means exceptional. Many other young officers serving their early years in India have done and still do the same. Perhaps the only difference between the good average subaltern and Haig was that he had already begun to commit to writing a detailed and discriminating analysis of his judgments and impressions. He had discovered that writing crystallizes thought. Later periods of leave during these early years he spent in visits to Germany and France, making careful record of the results of his observations. Chance had acquainted him with Sir Evelyn Wood, and to him Haig ventured to send a long account of his views on Germany. So great was the penetration and judgment shown in this letter that it left a lasting impression on Sir Evelyn Wood's mind, and when writing his "Recollections" after the outbreak of the Great War he referred to it. "Haig," he wrote, "knows more about the German Army than any officer in England. Twenty years ago he wrote me from Germany, where he was spending a long leave, a letter so full of prophetic knowledge that I sent it to his young wife to keep—some day someone who writes his life will see what he forecasted twenty years before he went

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to fight the Germans." To this letter, as much as to his own record, he owed his first staff appointment as A.D.C. to General Keith Fraser, the Inspector-General of Cavalry in England. By this time Haig's ambition was fully awakened. He was resolved to take high place in the Army. He had become convinced that he possessed the attributes of success. The discontent and aimlessness of his early manhood had given place to fixed resolve and restless ambition.

He was fully conscious of the disadvantages under which he laboured owing to his late entry into the Army. His contemporaries in length of service were several years his junior in age. Neither in regimental life nor as A.D.C. could he see any possibility of early advancement. There were but two avenues leading to high position—the Staff College and active service.

At this time Great Britain was enjoying one of her brief interludes of peace from the small wars which during the second half of the nineteenth century succeeded one another almost as regularly as harvest followed the seed-time. Even Egypt and the Soudan were at the moment quiescent. Haig decided to seek preferment first by way of the Staff College. The whole of the year that he was with General Keith Fraser he worked for long and laborious hours. Polo and all forms of sport or amusement were temporarily but definitely eschewed. He sat for his examination, but was rejected in the medical test for colour-blindness. An appeal to the Duke of Cambridge (then serving his last year as Commander-in-Chief), and the good offices of Sir Evelyn Wood and General Keith Fraser, procured him a nomination exempting him from the medical examination. The disability of colour blindness was permanent but slight: he could never distinguish pink from other shades of red. He never conquered, though he became expert in concealing the defect, which he would never willingly acknowledge. Probably very few even of those officers most closely in contact with him were aware of it.

Haig entered the Staff College in 1896. It was a vintage year. Among others who joined at the same time as Haig, there were many who in the fateful years that followed were

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to hold high office in the nation's service : Lord Allenby ;\* Sir Richard Haking,† who in the Great War was to command the XI Corps ; Sir Thomson Capper, afterwards first Commandant of the Indian Staff College, who later fell at Loos while in command of the 7th Division ; Sir William Furse‡ and Sir George Macdonagh,§ who subsequently became members of the Army Council ; and Sir J. E. Edmonds,|| who served at G.H.Q. in France throughout Haig's command, and who is the official historian of the Great War.

Sir Henry Hildyard was Commandant, but the outstanding personality on the instructional staff was Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, the historian and biographer of Stonewall Jackson, probably the finest teacher of the art of war that the British Army has yet produced. Henderson taught and inspired not only by lectures and set schemes. He delighted in assembling round him small batches of the students, and discussing each problem with them. He was a discriminating judge of character, and of Haig he made the second of the prophecies as to his future. "There is a fellow in your batch," he said, "who one of these days will be Commander-in-Chief." When Haig was appointed General Officer Commanding-in-Chief at Aldershot, Edmonds recalled to him Henderson's forecast, with the remark that it was not yet fulfilled, since Henderson had said "Commander-in-Chief, not General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of a command." Haig brusquely replied that "Henderson was talking through his hat."

The Staff College made a deep impression on Haig. He learnt much from it. History for the first time exercised its influence on his mind. Always accurate in thought, he now became precise in his reasoning. His pre-eminence at Sandhurst and in his regiment had tended to make him didactic and intolerant. The frank and free intercourse among the students and the trenchant criticism of the instructors provided an antidote. He lost none of his

\* Field-Marshal Viscount Edmund H. H. Allenby, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

† General Sir Richard C. B. Haking, G.B.E., K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

‡ Lieutenant-General Sir William T. Furse, K.C.B., D.S.O.

§ Lieutenant-General Sir George M. W. Macdonagh, G.B.E., K.C.B., K.G.M.G.

|| Brigadier-General Sir J. E. Edmonds, C.B., C.M.G.

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self-reliance and independence of judgment, but he gained a breadth of outlook and an ability to appreciate the point of view of others which was later to stand him in good stead.

He neither courted nor acquired popularity. He still tended to stand aloof; but at the Staff College he made friendships which endured until the end of his life. In particular he formed a firm and lasting friendship with Edmonds, and with Arthur Blair, who in the later years of his life was associated with himself in work for the ex-Service men. At the Staff College, too, he made one of his few successful after-dinner speeches, discoursing on the advantages of hunting and polo as adjuncts to brain-exercise. Topography, he contended, was better learnt on horseback than on maps. From the Staff College he carried away with him a belief in the "educated soldier," which never afterwards faltered.

General Edmonds records that he never "made the slightest attempt to 'play up to' the instructors. If a scheme interested him he took tremendous pains with it; if he thought there was no profit in working it out, he sent in a perfunctory minimum. I remember a road reconnaissance sketch on which most of us lavished extreme care, marking all the letter-boxes, pumps, gateways into fields and such-like. Haig handed in a sheet with a single brown chalk-line down the centre, the cross roads shown and the endorsement 'twenty miles long, good surface, wide enough for two columns with orderlies both ways.'"

At the final outdoor examination by Brevet Lt.-Col. Plumer\* he worked in a syndicate with Edmonds and Blair. Always impatient of examinations, Haig contented himself with laying down the general lines of the solution, and told Edmonds that he could "provide the *jargon* which the examiners expected."

He never wearied of acknowledging the debt which he owed to Sir Henry Hildyard and to Colonel Henderson, but his gratitude to individuals did not prevent him from criticizing the system. He noted a tendency for the studies to become academic rather than practical, and for the criticism of the

\* Field-Marshal Lord Plumer, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., G.B.E.

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Staff to be destructive rather than constructive. Many years later he had occasion, when in high office at the War Office, to attend a conference at the Staff College: it fell to the lot of a subordinate staff officer to expound the proposal for the formation of a General Staff in the Army. The young officer was followed by a very senior general—a master of irony and wit—who endeavoured to kill the project by ridicule and destructive criticism. General Haig rose white with anger, chin stuck out, and spoke two sentences: “General X tells us that our plan is bad and ridiculous. I suggest that before any other officer speaks he should explain to us a better way.”

The Staff College also provided Haig with most of the humorous stories that formed his somewhat slender repertoire for the rest of his life. The tale of the high official of the War Office who, when inspecting the College, said to the students: “I notice that most of your curriculum is devoted to war. Gentlemen, two-thirds of your life will be spent in peace: study peace, gentlemen, study peace.” And of the other inspecting officer, who addressing the three students of highest repute is stated to have said: “Your commandant tells me that you all three show independence of judgment, intelligence, willingness to accept responsibility, and self-reliance: all of these drawbacks you will in time learn to correct.” If worthless in themselves, the impression that the anecdotes made on Haig illustrates the limitations of his sense of humour. It was the incongruous rather than the humorous that made appeal.

Haig left the Staff College a marked man—yet his prospects of high command were not great. He was thirty-five years of age and still a captain, with no immediate prospects of promotion. He had seen no active service at a period when many of his contemporaries were blazoned with medals. He had little personal influence and few friends. If some other sphere of activity outside the Army had offered an outlet for his energy and ability at this time, not many would have blamed him had he accepted it; but no such thought crossed his mind. The years had passed by unnoticed. The hard mental work had been accompanied by continuous

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bodily exercise. He looked and felt younger than his years. His service in the East had left no ill effects on him. He avoided every form of excess ; he ate and drank sparingly. A slight tendency to bronchitis and asthma had led him to give up tobacco.

With his mind fully stored with military lore ; in perfect health, full of self-confidence ; with success achieved in every effort he had made since he entered Sandhurst, he left the Staff College to seek and await the opportunity of proving himself on active service—and opportunity was waiting on the doorstep.

## CHAPTER II

### ACTIVE SERVICE IN EGYPT AND SOUTH AFRICA

IN 1896, when Haig had just entered the Staff College, Kitchener had struck his first blow at the power of the Mahdi in the Soudan. The province of Dongola had been cleared. Another year of preparation had been followed by the occupation of Berber. By the end of 1897, when Haig was leaving Camberley, Kitchener was ready for his next effort. He applied to the Staff College for one or two Special Service officers to complete his requirements for the forthcoming campaign, and Haig, Blair and Capper were selected. On arrival in Egypt, Haig was first given command of a squadron and shortly afterwards was appointed Staff Officer to Colonel Broadwood, commanding the ten squadrons of the Egyptian Cavalry. The Soudan campaign was at best a small war. Its success was a triumph of patient preparation, of administration and of determination, rather than of strategical science and tactical skill.

Few opportunities offered for those serving with the cavalry to display their capacity; but such as did offer Haig eagerly grasped. Three days before the final battle of April 18th, 1898, a reconnaissance in force—reminiscent of the battles of Frederick the Great—of the enemy's entrenched position was ordered, and the cavalry with Broadwood in command, and Haig as Staff Officer, necessarily played the principal part. An article published twelve years later and attributed to the pen of Haig himself is the only account extant. To the present age with its knowledge of modern warfare the account reads more like the description of a fantastic field day than the record of an operation of war, but at the time it was sufficiently real.

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The force moved off at dawn accompanied by a host of spectator officers bored with weeks of idleness in camp and wishful for exercise. No one expected from the enemy any more active opposition than from the flagged enemy at a sham fight: but the Dervishes had other views. They chose to attack, and apparently succeeded in attaining the complete surprise of at least one portion of the British-Egyptian force, and a reasonable amount of disorganization among the Egyptian Cavalry. As the article described it, the situation, if not dangerous, was awkward. The initiative of Haig, who, on his own responsibility, brought into action a battery of horse artillery, and provided a pivot round which the cavalry could rally and re-form their ranks, saved the situation. It was a small—almost trivial—incident, but it sufficed to attract the attention of Kitchener to Haig.

In the subsequent weeks of the campaign he had no fighting, but considerable administrative work, and when the *Gazette* appeared, he received the first official acknowledgment of his military work in the form of a brevet-majority.\*

An even more important indication, however, of the opinion entertained of him at the War Office was his appointment as Brigade Major of the Cavalry Brigade at Aldershot, then under the command of John French.†

Neither the brevet rank nor the new appointment satisfied him. He felt that the Egyptian Campaign had been a failure as far as he was concerned. He was thirty-eight years of age and still a regimental captain. There was no prospect of swift promotion. The goal of his ambition was still dim and distant. The war in Egypt was definitely over, and there seemed little probability of any further active service in the near future. His work at Aldershot did not absorb him, and the amusements of London entirely failed to attract him. He fell a victim to discontented ambition. Even his studies were in arrears, and he became morose and brusque in

\* Haig and Lord Rawlinson of Trent, who were destined to be so closely associated in the Great War, first met during the Egyptian campaign. Rawlinson in his diary records the impression made on him by Haig's confident bearing, and his ability to inspire his Fellaheen troops with such courage that, "for the first time in history, they were able to stand and attack the warlike Dervishes."

† Afterwards Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force.



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manner. This was perhaps the least satisfactory year of Haig's military life ; but it proved only a brief interval.

In October, 1899, the Transvaal and Orange Free State declared war on Cape Colony and Natal. A few weeks earlier Haig had accompanied his Brigade Commander—John French—to South Africa.

Although as early as 1897 preparations had been inaugurated in London for the mobilization of a Field Force for South Africa, there was as yet no General Staff at the War Office. Even the Staff College was in its infancy. Strategy was known to exist—was even privately studied by a few select officers as an abstract and not uninteresting science—but there was no section of the military organization responsible for its application to the problems of the Empire. "England," wrote Admiral Mahan, the American historian, "trusts in Providence and the timely appearance of a heaven-born leader ;" and certainly in these last years of the nineteenth century she took no active steps to counteract or meet the dangers threatened by Boer disaffection.

Although the home authorities had realized that the strained relations in South Africa might develop into active hostilities, the outbreak of war found the Army totally unprepared. Although the strategical problem had been studied, and accurate estimates of the strength of the Boer armed forces had been framed, no preparation had been made to cope with the difficulties of transportation, and there was no strategical plan.

The strength of the force which was mobilized was based upon a general impression gained by a few officers who chanced to have visited the country, and both in size and organization it was inadequate for the task it was called upon to perform.

A force of eight regiments of cavalry, eight companies of mounted infantry, four batteries of horse and fifteen batteries of field artillery, with thirty-two battalions of infantry, was organized as one Army Corps (three Infantry Divisions) and one Cavalry Division, with the necessary lines of communication troops—a grand total of about 48,000 men.\* A force of 10,000 men was also despatched from India.

\* Before the end of 1900, 18 regiments of cavalry, 55 batteries of horse and field artillery and 86 battalions were engaged in South Africa, with a maximum strength of 176,278 men, and an average of 150,000 during the last few months of the war.

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John French was given command of the Cavalry Division, and was almost immediately engaged in the Battle of Elands-laagte, the first victory won by the British in the South African War. It is not, nor will it ever be, possible wholly to separate the work of the commander of a small military formation and that of his chief staff officer; but while to French as commander is due the credit for the brilliant fight, it can fairly be said that Haig supplemented French's determination and energy by a deep knowledge of the science of war and the trained brain of a Staff College graduate. Elands-laagte was in its way a masterpiece. There was a long twelve-hour march to reach the position for attack; there were a series of difficult ridges to surmount, with the intervening valleys swept by rifle fire; there was the final half-hour's fierce and bitter hand-to-hand fighting—"the half an hour crammed with the life of half a lifetime"—the flight and pursuit of the beaten foe.

Although still a staff officer without independent responsibility, Haig had full scope for his energy with French. Cape Colony had been invaded. Colesberg was taken by the Boers, and the whole of the Colesberg, Aliwal, Albert and Berkeley East area was in danger of being overrun. To meet the danger a mixed force was placed under Sir John French, with Haig still as his Chief Staff Officer, and with Herbert Lawrence\* as Intelligence Officer, and Aylmer Hunter-Weston† as head of the administrative staff. There followed the "Colesberg Campaign." At a time when the general outlook was almost uniformly dark in South Africa, it stood out as a conspicuous success. Although French as commander is fully entitled to the chief credit, the operation bears the unmistakable impress of Haig's influence. Col. Horne,‡ who joined the Cavalry Division in front of Colesberg, and who was an eye-witness and participant in the campaign, subsequently maintained that it was Haig's knowledge and sagacity, combined with French's energy and daring, which won for the Cavalry and

\* Now General Sir Herbert A. Lawrence, G.C.B.: Haig's Chief of Staff in 1918.

† Now Lieutenant-General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.P.

‡ Now General Lord Horne, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., A.D.C.

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Horse Artillery their great success. There was the strict adherence to method, both in plan and execution ; the same vigorous offensive which marked all Haig's actions ; the same careful regard to every detail that contributed to success. The orders, which it fell to his lot as Chief Staff Officer to issue on behalf of his Commander, were almost all written in his own hand. His precise and accurate mind enabled him to indite them with hardly a correction. They are models of lucidity.

Sir Redvers Buller's failure to relieve Ladysmith resulted in Lord Roberts's appointment to the chief command in South Africa, with Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff. The Cavalry Division was gradually assembled on the Modder River, with French still in command and Haig as his Chief Staff Officer. On the 12th February, 1900, Lord Roberts began his advance, and on the 15th February French led his cavalry by a forced march and relieved Kimberley—a brilliant feat of arms. By the middle of March Bloemfontein fell, and on the 5th June Lord Roberts entered Pretoria.

During all these operations Haig fulfilled adequately, but without opportunity for personal distinction, the duties of his staff appointment. By the end of the year independent command came to him. "Cape Colony," wrote the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa to London, "continues to be unsatisfactory. I have sent down Douglas Haig, with local rank of Colonel, to see what can be done, and to take charge in the field." From that time until the end of the war on the 31st May, 1902, he remained in command of a column of troops. The fighting had taken the form of guerrilla warfare. The small columns were employed in rounding up small bodies of the enemy, and in forestalling and preventing their raids into friendly territory. Although while in independent command Haig fought no notable battle or even engagement, yet he showed as a Column Commander the same efficiency as when a staff officer of larger forces. The Staff diaries which he kept in the course of his duty as Column Commander were sent to the Staff College, where they were retained for many years as models of what such documents should be.

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Promotion followed in rapid course. He was gazetted to the command of the 17th Lancers, then serving in South Africa. The 17th Lancers did not view his arrival with unmixed satisfaction. He was a transfer from another regiment—never a popular appointment with any unit. There was an officer of distinction in the regiment who was passed over in favour of Haig; moreover, Haig was known to be a strict disciplinarian and a hard taskmaster. Strange though it seems to those who knew him only during the later years of his life, he was generally held at this time to be lacking in understanding and sympathy with his subordinates—both officers and men.

On the day that he first went to the regiment it was on the march, and Haig at once called on one of the junior officers\* to ride with him. He commenced forthwith a military catechism. Sharp abrupt questions were asked—small military problems were presented for solution. The young officer, greatly depressed, felt that his worst fears were being realized. He was being examined at a time when there was a current saying among officers that “one half of the fools in the Army spend their time examining the other half.” As the long day wore on, the young officer discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that the purpose was to instruct, and not to discover shortcomings. In his new Commanding Officer he found a friend instead of a hostile critic, and the friendship remained unbroken until severed by death.

Extra-regimental promotion was not the only, nor indeed the greatest, of the honours which the South African Campaign brought to Haig. He received his brevet as full colonel; he was awarded the C.B.; was appointed A.D.C. to the King and received four mentions in despatches and every clasp that the medals of the two campaigns could carry.

He brought with him from South Africa a deep and lasting affection for the country, and for her people. In after years his mind often reverted to the strenuous days of his first serious warfare—for Egypt he always regarded as little better than a rehearsal for warlike experience—and none of the visits which he paid in the years of partial leisure,

\* Now Brigadier B. Fisher, C.M.G., D.S.O

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when his active service was over, filled him with such pleasure as his tour in South Africa in 1921. The son of General Botha, the Commander-in-Chief of the Boer forces, served on his personal staff in France.

Neither the strategy nor the tactics nor the Headquarters Administration of the British Armies in South Africa excited Haig's admiration. His own arm, the cavalry, had not met with conspicuous success. It had degenerated into mounted infantry. Greatly though Haig respected Lord Kitchener for his driving power and his determination, he criticized his tendency to ignore his staff and to neglect staff work. To Haig's mind the war had been fought in haphazard fashion: the lessons which he himself had learnt were negative not positive. Methods to be avoided, rather than those to be adopted, had been exemplified. During the years that intervened before 1914 his work was devoted to rectifying the errors and supplying the deficiencies which the South African War had brought to light, not to training the army to fight on the South African model.

South Africa had provided him with an invaluable personal servant—Secrett—who remained with him throughout the whole of his active life as a soldier, and led his charger behind the gun-carriage in the funeral procession. To Haig, Secrett was more than a personal servant. He was an institution. "We picked one another up in South Africa," said Secrett years afterwards, "and since then we never looked back." The devotion of the soldier servant of the old pre-War army was one of the most pleasing incidents of service, and Secrett identified himself completely with his master. On one occasion he brought a pair of Haig's riding-breeches to the A.D.C. in charge of Government House at Aldershot, and remarked: "Look at these, sir. We have only worn these for five months and look at them now!"

At the age of forty-one, with only sixteen years' service, Colonel Haig, C.B., A.D.C. to the King, returned to the town of his birth in command of one of the most famous of the cavalry regiments of the British Army, and showing no sign of the hardships of the three years of active service through which he had passed. He was still

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in perfect health, sturdily built, but without an ounce of superfluous weight, nor the sign of a grey hair ; his face was unlined, though perhaps the jaw was a little more firmly set than in the first years of his manhood and his eyes a little deeper and more unflinching. He still devoted the same scrupulous attention to his attire. Now with his future assured to him, and with the growing conviction that he was destined for something beyond mere success, "Douglas Haig, *sometimes* a good boy," had developed into "Douglas Haig, *certainly* a great soldier."

## CHAPTER III

### EDINBURGH: 17TH LANCERS

EDINBURGH, "the east-windy, west-endy" town, of Professor John Stuart Blackie, is an academic rather than a military centre. The uniform of the infantry soldier is tolerated by the inhabitants as a picturesque adornment to the Castle, and the cavalry excites an amused interest; but the small garrison leads a life apart from the rest of the ancient city. Nor does the limited number of troops quartered in Edinburgh give scope for intensive military training. Edinburgh had always a great fascination for Haig. He loved its grandeur and its beauty; even its biting east winds were pleasant to him. His shyness responded to the knowledge that he could pass unnoticed in its streets. He had relations living near—if not indeed actually in—the city; it held the associations of early youth, and it was within easy distance of the kingdom of Fife, where his childhood's home had been. Haig welcomed for a time the ease that Edinburgh was to offer after the toil of South Africa, and he rejoiced in the command of his regiment. He was determined that it should stand pre-eminent among cavalry regiments in every branch of corporate life. He was tireless in his efforts to help those of his officers who sought his assistance in their technical studies.

He resumed his polo, and in due course the regiment won the first inter-regimental championship to be played after the South African War. He renewed his slight acquaintance with golf, but a round of golf was insufficient exercise for the day, and he was accustomed to walk carrying his own

clubs to and from the course, and he preferred—though he did not insist—that any of the officers who might be playing with him should do likewise.

Partly owing to his inherent preference for being alone and apart, and partly because he felt that the presence of the Commanding Officer in a Mess prevented free and frank intercourse among the junior officers, he took his meals in his own quarters. He speedily disarmed those who resented his transfer from another regiment and earned the devoted admiration of both officers and men. Though not a rich man—there were many officers in his own regiment with larger incomes—he had one rule from which he never allowed himself to depart : if any of the officers participated in any game or function with him they were his guests during the whole time they were together. He insisted on meeting every penny of any expenditure incurred. He went little into society. Neither dancing nor cards nor social life laid any spell upon him. Though he won and retained the friendship of his officers, yet it was largely one-sided. Partly from his position as commanding officer, and still more from his own inclination, he remained solitary, aloof and alone.

His duties as A.D.C. to the King brought him into personal contact with his Sovereign, and he speedily attracted the attention and earned the personal esteem of that most shrewd judge of character, H.M. King Edward VII.

The months passed pleasantly. Haig was no longer—as in the interval between the Egyptian and South African campaigns—discontented or restless. His level judgment assured him of further preferment, and he waited patiently for his next chance to come, and it was not long delayed.

From South Africa, Lord Kitchener had gone to India as Commander-in-Chief, and had immediately begun a drastic reform of the organization and distribution of the Army in India. His South African experience had shown him how far behind the times the British Army had allowed itself to lag. The Army in India had had the incentive of repeated small frontier wars, and in all of these it had acquitted itself creditably ; but neither in training nor organization was it adequate for the demands which might be made on it. Of all the



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branches of the army, the cavalry—with least opportunity for active service on the frontier—was in Lord Kitchener's opinion most in need of invigorating reorganization and reform.

The post of Inspector-General of Cavalry fell vacant, and Kitchener—searching his mind for the most suitable man—recalled the work done by Haig both in Egypt and in South Africa, and made urgent application for his services. Criticism and opposition to the appointment were not lacking. Haig had seen less than twenty years' service. He was only a Colonel, and the appointment was usually held by a Major-General; but Haig's reputation was high and Lord Kitchener insistent, and in 1903 Haig, as Inspector-General of Cavalry, returned to India, which he had left ten years before as a junior captain. A year later he was promoted Major-General in his forty-third year.

## CHAPTER IV

### INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF CAVALRY IN INDIA

THE task with which Haig was now confronted was peculiar, both in its requirements and in its limitations. He was head of the mounted forces in India, but he had no actual powers of command. He was directly responsible to the Commander-in-Chief alone. There was no General Staff either to assist him or to direct his efforts. Lord Kitchener was immersed in administration; he had no time to devote to the training of the troops for war—nor indeed had he the knowledge required for the training of regiments in modern warfare. Haig was given a free hand. He threw himself into the task with boundless energy, and with a well-defined policy.

The guerrilla warfare of the last few months in South Africa had deepened his conviction of the vital necessity of encouraging and developing the individual intelligence of both officers and men. He faced the great problem of military training: how to combine implicit obedience to orders and the most rigid discipline with individual and intelligent initiative. At the time India produced her own text-books of military science, and one of Haig's first tasks was to bring the manual for cavalry up to the requirements of recent experience. South Africa, with its peculiar conditions, had brought into being a school of thought which believed that the day of shock tactics with the *arme blanche* was over, that the rifle of the mounted infantry had finally displaced the lance and sabre. The Indian cavalry under the influence of many of its officers who had served in South Africa with mounted infantry units was permeated with the

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new doctrine and looked for the approval of the new Inspector-General. There was a rude awakening. Haig would have none of it. Both at his inspection of regiments, and still more by means of his training memoranda and staff rides, he taught unceasingly to his cavalry in India that warfare still offered scope for horse and man and bare steel. The cavalry responded to the thrill of his training. At almost every one of his inspections he would inspire the troops with the definite hope of putting the skill they were acquiring in peace into practice. "The Cavalry of India," he would say, "will play a great part in warfare far beyond the frontiers of India." The brilliant successes of the mounted troops in Mesopotamia and in Palestine in the Great War fulfilled the prophecy.

Haig's inspection of units was an ordeal generally faced with some trepidation by the cavalry units. It was a ruthless testing out of every phase of the life of the unit. Hard physical fitness was demanded of every individual. Beautifully mounted, and in perfect physical condition himself, his exercises, conducted at full gallop, would try almost to breaking point the powers of endurance of officers—young and old. When the outdoor work was over there followed a most searching examination into the minutiae of administration. Nothing escaped his notice: no failure or shortcoming was allowed to pass without comment. Praise was scanty and very rare. The utmost that could be hoped for was that the Inspector-General should appear not dissatisfied. Yet fault was never found without cause, and the cavalry knew that the test, if severe, was in every respect fair. Instinctively it appreciated the character and ability of the young general: it respected him for his mastery of every branch of the work. It had boundless faith in him. Haig, on his side, quickly summed up the character and capacity of the commissioned ranks under his direction. "The subaltern and junior captain of the Indian Cavalry," he was wont to say at this period, "are the best of their rank in the Army. There is a sad falling off in the rank of Major, and the Commanding Officers are almost all past their work."

He introduced into India the system of Staff Rides—

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destined to become an accepted method of instruction in the British Army. A brilliant young officer of the Indian Cavalry—Philip Howell—had attracted his attention, and he had secured him as his personal staff officer. The preliminary work for a Staff Ride involved very arduous and careful preparation. Howell proved invaluable as an assistant. At the end of his term of office Haig published the result of their exercises in a volume called “Cavalry Studies,” which at once became a standard text-book.

But perhaps Haig's greatest service to the cavalry in India was the formation of the Cavalry School at Saugor, whereby officers from all cavalry regiments could keep abreast of modern teaching. At his first inspection of the new school, Haig noticed with some amazement that one of the roads bore the name of *Childers Road*. At the time Mr. Erskine Childers was a prominent advocate of mounted infantry doctrine. Haig asked from the Commandant an explanation. “Ah, sir,” said the Commandant, “that road is a *cul-de-sac*, and leads to the cemetery.”

Although Haig's chief task was the training of the Indian Cavalry for war, his personality left its impress in many other directions. Both Lord Kitchener and he were concerned at the fact that most of the officers of the Indian Cavalry were living beyond their means. It was primarily due to Haig that steps were taken to correct the evil. Financial assistance was obtained from the Government for the initial expense on joining the cavalry. Commanding Officers were held responsible for keeping mess bills within proper proportions, and expenditure on superfluous articles of uniform was abolished. Nor were his efforts towards ameliorating the lot of the Army in India confined to the officers; he obtained cheaper passages for the British soldier proceeding on furlough, and an increase in the kit money of the native soldier.

More important than all this, however, in the subsequent history of the Army in India, and of the Empire, were his efforts to secure for India an efficient Staff. He had been impressed by the low level of Staff work in India, and by the very small number of Staff officers trained in the scientific principles of their profession. The authorities at home refused

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to extend the accommodation at Camberley, and without extension it could barely provide sufficient staff officers for the army at home. Only a few vacancies were reserved for the Indian Army, and it was necessary to undergo specialized and expensive preliminary studies to be successful in the severe competitive entrance examination. There were no facilities for such training in India, and the Indian Army Officer could seldom afford—even if he could obtain sufficient leave—to “cram” in England.

Haig would have preferred the expansion of Camberley with special facilities for candidates from India, but as that proved impossible he threw the whole weight of his influence on the side of Lord Kitchener's alternative proposal to reproduce a Camberley in India. Before Haig's recall for service at the War Office, the proposal for a Staff College at Quetta had been approved, the building had been begun, and the scientific training by a Staff College course had already been instituted in improvised buildings at Deolali.

The impression which Haig's personality had made on King Edward had far-reaching results. The King had asked Haig to communicate to him personally his opinion on the cavalry in India, and on the other military problems which were then arousing interest in India, and Haig had responded in a series of letters setting forth his views in considerable detail.

Lord Kitchener's schemes for the reform of the Army in India had been hampered and shackled by the system of military administration. The age-old conflict between civilian control and expert military advice had in India produced a peculiarly cumbersome compromise between the systems obtaining in Great Britain and in autocratic European countries. The Cabinet of Great Britain had its counterpart in the Council of the Viceroy. The Commander-in-Chief in India still had responsibilities similar to those of the Commander-in-Chief at the time in London. A military member of Council corresponded roughly to the civilian War Minister in London. There were, however, many important differences between the home organization and that of India. The most vital of these was that the military member was a

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soldier, not a civilian. Junior in rank to the Commander-in-Chief, he was yet able in virtue of his seat on the Viceroy's council to oppose his personal opinion against that of the Commander-in-Chief. Recommendations on small matters as well as great from the Commander-in-Chief were criticized and frequently rejected in the department of the military member. To a man of Kitchener's domineering character and recognized prestige, the position rapidly became intolerable. Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, gave the full weight of his support to the existing system, and the controversy developed into a battle between the great civilian administrator and the Commander-in-Chief. Eventually the Home Government gave its decision in favour of the soldier, and shortly afterwards Lord Curzon tendered his resignation.

Haig had been an interested spectator—though not immediately concerned in the controversy. He had given his own opinions in his letters to King Edward, and it may have been owing to his representations that the Sovereign expressed his complete approval of the final decision. "We soldiers," wrote Haig,\* "certainly owe the King a great deal of gratitude for the important share he has taken in bringing about this satisfactory change."

It was owing to his intimacy with the King that Haig first met the lady whom, in 1905, he married, and who was from that moment to bring to him the great happiness of his life. During a short leave in England he was invited by the King and Queen to be their guest at Windsor for the Ascot Races. The Hon. Dorothy Maud Vivian was at the time one of Queen Alexandra's Maids of Honour, and the pair met on the first day of the Race week. By the end of the week they were engaged to be married, and within a month the wedding was solemnized in the private chapel at Buckingham Palace—the first time that the chapel had been used for any ceremony not immediately connected with a member of the royal family. The King and Queen gave the wedding breakfast to celebrate the occasion. It was a curious coincidence that two years previously a fortune-teller at Harrogate had

\* Quoted by Sir George Arthur in "Lord Haig."

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foretold that his marriage would take place "in a King's house—though not to a lady of royal birth."

It may be that the shortness of Haig's leave from India had curtailed the period of the engagement, but Haig on hearing some comment on the brief time that had elapsed between his first meeting with his bride and the engagement, replied, "Why not? I have often made up my mind on more important problems than that of my own marriage in much less time." If the marriage had been hasty there was to be no repentance at leisure. It was from his marriage that Douglas Haig received the great abiding happiness of his life. His "aloneness" was from that time definitely and finally at an end.

Lady Haig fulfilled to perfection the difficult rôle that falls to the lot of the wife of a great man. She never interfered in official business, yet she was always there to help her husband. Her tact and intuition never failed. She was a discreet and sympathetic confidante and she strengthened his faith in his own power to overcome difficulties. She devoted every moment of her married life to her husband; and in the midst of all the heavy responsibilities which he was called upon to face she was never absent from his mind. She threw herself heart and soul into every activity in which she could directly assist the Army, and spared no effort to make herself acquainted with all the details of the problems which the married officers and men had to face. Work in the hospitals was her especial care, and she spent long hours in the wards and operating theatres of the hospitals in India and Aldershot, so that she might gain the practical experience necessary to enhance the value of her work. At the very outbreak of war she was immersed in a scheme, which had been devised, to give at moderate charges the best medical assistance to the wives and families of officers.

Although Haig kept his public and his private life distinct and separate, all his happiness and even all his pleasures lay in the time spent in his family circle. In the most crowded days of his life those hours snatched from work and spent with his family were to him "port after stormy seas." With his extraordinary power of detachment, which was one of

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his most marked characteristics, he never allowed his official duties and responsibilities to intrude during the brief intervals of leisure. Marriage brought to Haig completeness. While it did not reduce his ambition for high office, it gave it a different perspective. If he had been asked in 1904 what life held for him should he fall by the roadside on the path of professional advancement which he had marked out for himself, he would have replied, "Nothing." With his marriage that outlook was changed. He would have faced the future with equanimity, possibly even with pleasure, if his military career had been cut short.

He returned after his marriage to his task as Inspector-General of Cavalry, and he threw himself anew into his work. The first duty he undertook was to visit the newly established Staff College at Deolali. The training season of 1905-6 was perhaps the most arduous during his appointment. He was now thoroughly master of his work, and had visited and knew intimately every mounted unit in India. The new organization at Headquarters was in force. He possessed the complete confidence of the Commander-in-Chief; only one half of the term of his appointment was completed. His mind was still at times turned towards Europe, where he had discerned the gathering clouds, but he was not impatient for transfer home. His desire at that time was for the command of a division, and he was still too junior as a Major-General to expect the immediate fulfilment of that ambition.

The year 1906 brought great changes in Britain. The Conservative Government had fallen, and under the new administration Mr. Haldane\* had been appointed Secretary of State for War. The War Office at once brought to the notice of the new minister both the steady increase in armaments of the continental nations and the fact that Great Britain still had no satisfactory war organization.

A series of incidents in foreign politics had emphasized the ever-growing risk of a great conflagration in Europe. Lord Roberts was proclaiming his Universal Service campaign. The Esher Commission, assembled immediately after the conclusion of the South African War, had outlined an organization

\* Viscount Haldane of Cloan, K.T., O.M., P.C.



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for the War Office, including the formation of a General Staff, and effect had been given to these recommendations; but little or nothing had been done towards the organization of a fighting force, or towards the establishment of a school of military thought throughout the Army. The evidence which Haig himself had given before the commission had greatly impressed Lord Esher and the distinguished men associated with him. There was even a proposal, strongly supported in influential quarters, to appoint Haig to the newly-created post of Chief of the General Staff, and thus to make him the virtual head of the Army. Eventually it was held that he was still too junior to allow of his superseding so many of his superiors in rank, and a more senior officer was appointed.

The new War Minister realized from the first moment the magnitude of his task; but he also realized the necessity of proceeding step by step. For the first few months of his tenure of office—almost for the first year—he hardly ever gave any expression of opinion: he was content to learn. He listened carefully to the views of his military experts, he asked searching questions, but he gave no indication of what was passing in his own mind. Very soon he became convinced that the Staff at the War Office, although it included many able men, required strengthening if it was to cope with the problem. Even before this, King Edward had been urging upon Mr. Balfour—when Prime Minister—to bring Haig to the War Office, as the officer “whose experience of staff work in the field and whose high abilities should be utilized in this particular branch, where initiative and organizing power are at this moment much wanted, however great the loss to India may be of that officer’s services”;<sup>\*</sup> but nothing had been done.

Haldane, searching the ranks of the Army for a man to whom to entrust the task, recalled the recommendation made by King Edward. In a speech delivered after Haig’s death he subsequently defined the problem which confronted him, and gave the reasons which led him to select Haig. “We had no doubt that the Germans could not, in face of our magnificent and superior Fleet, invade this country directly: we knew them too well to think that they were

<sup>\*</sup> Sir George Arthur: “Lord Haig.”

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likely to try. But they had other means. If they could get possession of the northern ports of France, Calais, Dunkirk and Boulogne, then, with long-range guns and submarines, and with air fleets, they might make the position of this country a very precarious one in point of safety. That problem had to be thought out, and after surveying the whole Army, I took it upon myself to ask Lord Haig, who was then in India, to come over to this country and to think for us. From all I could discover even then, he seemed to be the most highly equipped thinker in the British Army."

In 1906 Haig received his summons from India. He gave up his appointment as Inspector-General of Cavalry, and left India on the 12th August, 1906. A fortnight later he assumed control of his new post at the War Office.

## CHAPTER V

### WAR OFFICE

THEN began the partnership between Haldane—the greatest civilian administrator the Army has known in modern times, not excepting Cardwell—and Haig, the future leader of Britain's greatest Army to its greatest victory.

There could be no more striking contrast in almost every respect than that afforded by the two men whose joint labours were to be of such vital import to the nation. Haldane, already "of full habit," with rounded shoulders and the typical features of the man of law; slovenly in his dress, scornful of physical exercise; a politician from his early days, ready of speech, gifted with a remarkable diversity of interests and knowledge; a most patient listener to the views of others; and, above all, expert in dissecting an argument into its essential parts. Haig, scrupulously neat in his person, in perfect physical condition, with few interests and little knowledge beyond and apart from the study of the science of warfare—distrustful of casuistry, impatient of opportunism, immensely tenacious of his own views, and somewhat stubborn in discussion; almost inarticulate when expressing his views by word of mouth, but with an exceptional facility for lucid expression in writing.

"They can only think talking," wrote Lord Asquith of certain other well-known men, "just as some people can only think writing. Only the salt of the earth can think inside, and the bulk of mankind cannot think at all." Both Haldane and Haig had this quality in common: they could "think inside." Mr. Haldane's trained mind quickly appreciated

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the wealth of knowledge and the penetrating judgment of this comparatively junior soldier. A score of years later Lord Haldane, himself within a few years of his own passing, paid his last tribute to the work that Haig did during those years at the War Office. "It was my privilege to work with him and take instruction from him. He had a singularly lucid mind, the most modest of demeanours, but, none the less, when he had formed a conclusion, he was both resolute and courageous." And Haig on the very day of the Peace procession through London in 1919, when the whole nation was doing him honour, still found time to pay a visit to Lord Haldane—no longer in power, and still under the cloud of his fellow-countrymen's unjust suspicion and distrust—to present to his old Chief a copy of his War Despatches with the inscription: "To Viscount Haldane of Cloan, the greatest Secretary for War England has ever had. In grateful remembrance of his successful efforts in reorganizing our military forces for a war on the Continent, notwithstanding much opposition from his Army Council,\* and the half-hearted support of his Parliamentary friends.—Haig, F.M."

This Army Council was not remarkable for its vision. Haig used to relate that a note submitted to one of the Council drawing attention to the development of aircraft, was returned with the curt endorsement: "We are no nearer the solution of the conquest of the air than we were in the days of Montgolfier's Fire Balloons."

When Haig took up his new duties at the War Office, the War Minister had already decided that, following the recommendations of the Esher Commission, the reorganization must include three definite phases:

1. The organization of an Expeditionary Force for service overseas—wherever the requirements of Great Britain's policy might demand.
2. The reorganization of the second line of defence in the voluntary army.

\* The Army Council to which Haig referred was the body holding office at the beginning of Lord Haldane's administration. During the later years the Army Council afforded him loyal and effective support.

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3. The perfecting of the General Staff at home, and the introduction into the Army of a definite school of thought and authoritative teaching in the science of war.

There were already on the General Staff at the War Office in the early months of 1906 many officers who were destined to become distinguished soldiers. Sir Neville Lyttelton<sup>o</sup> was Chief of the General Staff. Sir James Grierson<sup>\*</sup> was on the point of relinquishing his appointment as Director of Military Operations, and shortly after Haig's arrival was succeeded by Sir Spencer Ewart,<sup>†</sup> one of Haldane's most valued assistants, of whose work Haig later spoke in the highest terms. Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson<sup>‡</sup> (subsequently the distinguished and invaluable Chief of the Imperial General Staff throughout 1916 and 1917), General Sir Alexander Hamilton Gordon (later Haig's Director of Military Operations in India, and still later Commander of a Corps in France)<sup>§</sup>; and Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson<sup>||</sup> (who succeeded Sir William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1918), were all serving as Colonels on the General Staff at the War Office. When Wilson was transferred to the Staff College, he was succeeded by Col. L. E. Kiggell<sup>¶</sup> (later Haig's Chief of Staff in France during 1916 and 1917).

On Sir James Grierson's departure Haig found himself senior in rank among the directors of the several departments of the General Staff. Partly for this reason, and partly because the immediate work of reorganization (to which Haldane was then devoting his attention) fell within the duties of Haig's directorate, he became the right-hand man of the Secretary of State for War.

In order to co-ordinate the work in the various direc-

<sup>o</sup> General Rt. Hon. Sir Neville Lyttelton, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., C.B.

<sup>\*</sup> The late Lieutenant-General Sir James M. Grierson, K.C.B., C.V.O., C.M.G., A.D.C.

<sup>†</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir J. Spencer Ewart, K.C.B.

<sup>‡</sup> Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Bart., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., D.S.O.

<sup>§</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Alex. Hamilton Gordon, K.C.B.

<sup>||</sup> The late Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Bart., G.C.B., D.S.O.

<sup>¶</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir L. E. Kiggell, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

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torates, Haig inaugurated the practice of weekly conferences of the directors. But it is to the Secretary of State himself that the credit is due for the conception of the idea of re-organization and for the driving power that brought the plan to completion.

Haig's first task was concerned with the Expeditionary Force. There was much inertia within the War Office itself to be overcome. When Haig submitted to the Chief of the General Staff a paper requiring decision as to the size of the Force that should be prepared for service abroad, it came back with a note in blue pencil, "20,000 men." The Secretary of State had to intervene before this somewhat crude calculation was amended, and the final decision of six Infantry Divisions and one Cavalry Division (approximately 120,000 men) was given. It cannot be claimed that even this decision bore any real relationship to the task which the Army might be called upon to perform, either on the frontiers of the Empire or in warfare with a European Power. It was rather the maximum that could be obtained within the financial limits imposed by the Treasury and by Parliament: but it did mark a great advance on any previous effort at organization for war. It gave a homogeneous force—not indeed large enough for all eventualities—but still of sufficient size not to be ignored, even in a European disturbance; and in any other contingency sufficient to act as a defence behind which the resources and reserves of the Empire could be developed for war. The details of the composition and organization of the Expeditionary Force, worked out by Haig in 1906, only underwent minor alterations in the years that intervened before the scheme was put to the final test of war in 1914.

Nor was the progress made in the sister-directorate of Military Operations less remarkable. Under General Spencer Ewart the task of mobilization and concentration of the new Expeditionary Force was pressed forward. Complete railway time-tables\* for the concentration of the Expeditionary Force, and its movement to ports of embarkation were

\* The statement made on p. 90, Vol. I, of "Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson," by Major-General Callwell, that the compilation of these time-tables had not been attempted prior to Wilson's appointment as Director of Military Operations is incorrect.

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prepared, and informal negotiations were opened with the French General Staff for the employment of the Force on the Continent in co-operation with the French Army. The Chief of the General Staff, however, clearly stated to the French General Staff that the procedure was quite informal, and in no way committed the Governments of either country to any definite policy.

Even at this early date no one in close touch with events could fail to realize the precarious nature of the diplomatic situation, or to appreciate the nascent threat of a European conflagration. Although it was not the immediate concern of his directorate, Haig had already formed a very clear conception of the best method of employing the Expeditionary Force, and the probable course of the struggle. In view of the part he played in the proceedings of the fateful Council of War on August 5th, 1914, it is interesting to find that as early as 1906 and 1908 he was telling his subordinate, Major Maurice,\* that "We may well be fighting Germany in the next few years. . . . If we do," he added, "the right place for us to fight is where we can use our naval and our military power together with the greatest effect. In battle with troops as brave and as efficient as the Germans, we shall have to fight long and hard before we can hope for a decision. It will be dangerous to attempt a decisive blow until we have worn down the enemy's power of resistance. We must tell the army that."†

After the problem of the Expeditionary Force had been dealt with, Haldane directed Haig's attention to the problem of the reconstruction of the volunteer force. The spirit of the individual units was admirable. During the South African War a call had been made on units for volunteers for service, and there had been ready and adequate response; but there was no system. Units had been formed to meet the wishes of localities without any regard to military requirements. A heterogeneous collection of voluntary units was dotted about the country without any relation to each other, without any military organization, and without any system

\* Now Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, K.C.M.G., C.B.

† *British Legion Journal*, Memorial Issue.

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for mobilization. The proportion of artillery to infantry was unduly high. Haldane outlined his general plan of organizing the volunteer force on a territorial basis with the correct proportion, not only of cavalry, artillery and infantry, but even down to the smallest of the auxiliary units, for a division of an army in the field. Surplus units must be disbanded and reconstituted into units in which a deficiency occurred.

Haig's first proposal in conformity with Haldane's general plan was a force of twenty-eight Territorial Divisions, with certain divisions under liability for foreign service in case of national emergency, and in cadre form wherever there was not sufficient strength to complete establishment. He trusted to patriotism to fill the ranks in the case of a national emergency. Financial and political considerations forced the curtailment of this scheme. Ultimately a territorial organization of fourteen divisions was perfected; each division being complete in itself, with its due proportion of the three arms and of auxiliary troops.

Although Haig accepted the decision of the Secretary of State he never wholly agreed with it. And in the early months of the war, when Kitchener found it necessary to depart from the Territorial Organization and substitute his new armies, Haig repeatedly pointed out that better results would have been obtained had the original proposal of twenty-eight Territorial Divisions been adopted. The organization even of fourteen Territorial Divisions was a marked advance, and in 1914 it enabled the frontiers of distant parts of the Empire to be maintained, when every Regular unit was urgently required in the field of battle; and it produced an invaluable supply of commissioned, warrant, and non-commissioned officers, with at least some knowledge of and training in the profession of arms.

On the other hand, Haig neither approved of nor sympathized with Lord Roberts's campaign for Universal Service for Home Defence. He considered that it was based on wrong principles. He could not conceive of the possibility of an invasion of Great Britain. The war now rapidly approaching would be fought on the Continent. The money required by Lord Roberts's scheme to finance a large, loosely



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organized, and slightly trained army would be used to meet a contingency which was unlikely to occur. In Haig's opinion it could be spent more profitably in perfecting the Expeditionary Force, and the smaller but more highly trained Territorial Army.

Haig's belief and trust in the Territorial Force as an integral part of the system of national defence was a fixed conviction. Even before the South African War his studies had convinced him that in a great war the Regular Army of Great Britain could at best be little more than an advance guard, under cover of which the manhood of the nation could be mobilized and organized. His South African experience had confirmed him in this view, and both at the War Office and in his subsequent period of duty as Chief of Staff in India it was the basis of his teaching. He studied in great detail the method by which, in the Balkan war of 1912, the small standing army of Bulgaria expanded rapidly and easily into a formidable military machine. He despatched one of his own personal staff to examine their methods. He was insistent also that the Army at war should, from the earliest day of mobilization, absorb into its organization the best civilian experts for technical work. He had taught the same lesson in his Staff Tours in India, and when the problem of transportation of the armies in France became too complex for the purely military railway engineers he welcomed the appointment of Sir Eric Geddes and the influx into France of civilian transport experts.

Even these two great tasks—the scheme for the Expeditionary Force and the remodelling of the voluntary units—did not exhaust Haig's efforts during these four years of hard work at the War Office. The General Staff there was still young and inexperienced in its work, and was not yet comprehensive in its structure. Its work was confined to the troops serving in Great Britain or in the Crown Colonies : it had no concern with the Army in India or with the forces of the Dominions of the Crown overseas. Already Australia had begun to consider the proposals that were to give birth to her very considerable compulsory-service army within a few

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years.\* Haig, with his recollections of India fresh in his mind, was aware that there existed in that great dependency valuable resources of personnel for the armed service of the Crown. If these troops from the Overseas Dominions and Dependencies were to be used in war alongside the British Expeditionary Force, it was essential that they should be organized and trained on a homogeneous system. Haig therefore proposed to the Secretary of State that the General Staff of the British Army should be extended and developed into the Imperial General Staff of the Forces of the Empire. Mr. Haldane gave his full support to this measure. The Overseas Dominions readily accepted the scheme, and within the last year of Haig's term of duty at the War Office, "the General Staff," in Lord Haldane's own words, "became the Imperial General Staff—no longer a local organization, but part of the military equipment of the Empire."

It is not easy to estimate the full effect of Haig's four years of work at the War Office on the fate of the country when the final test came in 1914. Each and every portion was vital to the progress of the operations. Every measure which Haig either introduced in outline or perfected in detail functioned effectively in those early days of stress and strain. Nothing had to be undone. His successors at the War Office elaborated his proposals, but their measures were additions to—not substitutions for—his work. The design was complete; the foundations were well and truly laid, and the framework of the edifice had been completed during the time that Haig was at the War Office.

As in South Africa, and during his tenure of the post of Inspector-General of Cavalry, his work, immense and complex though it was, was performed quietly and unobtrusively. There was no attempt to attract public attention—no effort to assert his own personality outside the limits of his sphere of work. With the exception of his own civilian chief, he saw little of the statesmen then in control of the Government

\* All the Dominions had provided large contingents for the South African War. Nearly one-sixth of the whole force, and nearly two-fifths of the mounted force in South Africa, had been contributed by the Overseas Dominions. Australia had sent 16,378, Canada 7,289 and New Zealand 6,416. Even Ceylon had contributed a couple of hundred and India some three hundred troops.

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of Great Britain. He was not a clubman. He did not frequent the political dinner parties which sometimes afford ambitious soldiers the path to influence and advancement. Nor did he give social entertainments in his own home. He was accustomed to ask those with whom he was working at the War Office to be his guests at his house ; but immediately the meal was over he was wont to take them with him to his study and continue the discussion of the problem with which he had been dealing in office hours.

During his years at the War Office he "scorned delights and lived laborious days ;" but he left the War Office with his reputation in military circles greatly enhanced and firmly established.

Among his contemporaries in rank his only military rival was Sir James Grierson, like Haig a soldier drawn from a family with no hereditary military traditions, who through sheer merit had risen almost as rapidly as Haig himself, and who was now commanding a division at Aldershot.

There was one marked difference between the characters of the two men. General Grierson had a genius for friendship. Both among his seniors and juniors he counted many intimate friends. In Haig the early tendency to remain alone and aloof had deepened with the years. He had made no intimate friends among his contemporaries or his superiors. Those who were serving under him were devotedly attached to him, but the relationship was always that of the senior officer and subordinates. It was never allowed to slip into personal intimacy. Strictly formal in his dealings with his own superiors, he demanded the same rigid observance of rank from those serving with him and under him. The charm of his own personality was remarkable in its strength, but it almost appeared as though he was immune from the influence of charm in others. The sincere kindliness of his nature was instinctively felt, rather than perceptible through outward manifestation.

Already the courtesy which was so prominent a feature in his dealings with everyone, of high and low position, when he was in supreme command of the British Armies in France had become noticeable, but his courtesy had in it something

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of the frigid. There was ever an intangible barrier that effectively prevented any approach to intimacy or even cordiality.

With the younger generation, and particularly with the officers of his own regiment, the barrier was down. Though his time with the regiment had been brief, the friendships he had made were lasting. Principle reinforced inclination. It was one of those considered opinions which were the lodestone of Haig's life, that the regiment should be as a family to its officers. He sought to be the elder brother, not only of those officers who had served under him in Edinburgh, but to every officer who subsequently joined the 17th Lancers. To a lesser extent it was the same with his own original regiment, the 7th Hussars; but with the 17th the connection was closer. He had been in command; he had been for a time responsible for moulding its customs and controlling its destinies. It was almost part of his being. It was in the association with regimental friends and in his family life that he found happiness; he asked nothing more of fortune.

Two daughters were born during these years in London, and were named after their godmothers, Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria; and with these first names were coupled those of his sister Henrietta in the case of the elder girl, and of Rachel, his own mother, in the case of the younger—his tribute to the only two women who had won his affections as a boy.

Keenly interested though he was in his work at the War Office, and though the strain had left no mark on his health, he welcomed the termination of his time in London. Half in jest he had said to an officer who had sought the extension of his period of employment at the War Office: "It is a good thing to see inside the War Office for a short time, as it prevents one from having any respect for an official letter, but it is a mistake to remain there."

He had only two regrets on leaving London to take up the proffered appointment of Chief of the Staff in India. The first was that if war should break out in Europe while he was in India he might miss an opportunity for active service in

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the field; and the second that his children could not accompany him to the East. He and his wife would have to suffer the fate of almost all married officers of the Army in India—separation from their family. On the other hand, the proffered appointment was another high rung in the ladder of promotion. Just as, while still a Colonel, he had been given a Major-General's appointment as Inspector-General of Cavalry, so now, as a Major-General, he was being offered an appointment that was normally held by a Lieutenant-General. It was another mark of confidence from those in authority, and Haig was greatly gratified.

The nature of the work that he would have to undertake was moreover such as he most desired. Lord Kitchener's scheme of reorganization had passed through its initial stages, but difficulties had arisen. Criticism was rife. Sir William Nicholson, now the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London—an officer with an intimate personal knowledge of Indian conditions—had presided over a commission which had submitted a report recommending drastic amendments. The report struck indeed at what in Haig's view was the vital feature of Lord Kitchener's proposal. It questioned the advisability of the armed forces of India being so organized as to be able to take the field in strength against a European Army.

The civil element in the Government of India would have welcomed any chance of curtailing Army expenditure. Sir O'Moore Creagh, V.C., who had succeeded Lord Kitchener as Commander-in-Chief, though rich in experience of Indian warfare, had had no opportunity of keeping in touch with the development of military science and thought, and might not be able to resist the pressure brought to bear on him. There was a danger that the whole of Lord Kitchener's scheme might be abandoned. Haig believed that he could succeed in preserving its basic principles, while using the experience gained at the War Office to amend it in detail. He welcomed the opportunity of rounding off and completing Lord Kitchener's work, and at the same time of reproducing in India a General Staff similar to the body he had helped to organize at the War Office. Moreover, in

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the training of the Army in India he perceived an opportunity of fitting himself for high command in the great European War, which he now believed inevitable.

He eagerly accepted the new appointment, and in October, 1909, handed over his duties at the War Office to his successor, and turned his face towards his new duties and his new task.

## CHAPTER VI

### INDIA AS CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

IF the military organization at Headquarters in India, which Lord Kitchener had found intolerable in 1903, was obsolete, the substitute which Haig found on his arrival in India in 1909 was far from perfect.

Lord Kitchener had aimed at the concentration of the whole military organization under one head—the Commander-in-Chief—who would control through various departments the training, organization, equipment and administration of the Army. This proposal, however logical and sound, involved a departure from the accepted system of office administration within the Government of India, where each department was governed by a Member of Council and a Secretary to the Government with certain independent functions. Partly for this reason, but mainly because the civil authorities considered that Lord Kitchener's proposal threatened to give undue weight to the military opinion of one soldier in the Council, a compromise had been substituted.

The Military Member, who had proved the thorn in Lord Kitchener's side, had been abolished, and had given place to a Supply Member with limited functions. This compromise had proved both expensive and ineffective, and after a short time the Supply Member had been abolished, and his functions had been transferred to the Commander-in-Chief, who was thus given a dual capacity. He was Commander-in-Chief, with a staff of military officers, and Military Member, with a Secretary in the Army Department, who with a small staff performed administrative—and

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practically civil—duties. It followed almost of necessity from the dual capacity of the Commander-in-Chief that dual functions were repeated in the subordinate officers of the staff. It is no exaggeration to say that with the exception of the small body of officers who formed the staff of the Secretary in the Army Department, the whole of Army Headquarters had dual functions. The chain of responsibility was chaotic. There was a rubric of regulations to govern the action of officers, called by the not inappropriate title: “A Compendium of Office Rules for the Army Department and Headquarters of the Army in India.”

Haig himself referred to the whole system as the “canonization of duality.” The principal staff officers were not only staff officers to the Commander-in-Chief, but also heads of divisions of the Army Department. As principal staff officers they had direct access to the Commander-in-Chief and could act in his name; as heads of divisions in the Army Department they could only approach the Army Member through the Secretary, and receive the Army Member’s orders through him. As the Commander-in-Chief and the Army Member were one and the same person, and as the Army Secretary was secretary to the Government of India, with direct access to the Viceroy, it is easy to realize the confusion and friction that inevitably resulted.

The report of Sir William Nicholson’s Committee summarized the position as follows:

“The prescribed procedure seems complicated and perplexing. When a case is submitted to the Commander-in-Chief His Excellency has to determine whether it comes under his control as Commander-in-Chief or as Army Member. If the former, he can give his orders thereon to the responsible officer of the Headquarters Staff; if the latter, he ought to give his orders to the Secretary in the Army Department, by whom alone the case has to be submitted to him. The principal Staff Officers are placed in an equally awkward position. When dealing with any question which comes before them they have to consider whether or not that question involves a reference to the Government of India. If in their judgment it does not, they can submit the question to the Commander-in-Chief direct, but otherwise they should only approach His Excellency through the Secretary in the Army Department. The position of the Secretary is no less embarrassing.



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If he adheres strictly to the rules and insists that every case emanating from the Headquarters which requires a reference to the Government of India is submitted to the Army Member through and by himself, friction and antagonism are not unlikely to arise between him and the principal officers of the Headquarters Staff."

It was inevitable that under this system all important cases came before the Commander-in-Chief twice, each time submitted by different subordinates, who probably each advocated different and often contradictory solutions of the problem. Cases were not unknown of the Commander-in-Chief disagreeing with himself as Army Member.

Almost equally disadvantageous to the cause of efficiency in the Army was the duty imposed upon the Commander-in-Chief as the solitary military member of the Viceroy's Council. As a member of Council he had to give his vote, which might often be decisive, on questions totally unconnected with military matters. He had, moreover, the duty of appreciating and advising the Viceroy and the Council on the military effect of the numerous and varied questions of policy which came before the Council from the Departments other than his own. It was consequently rarely practicable for him to absent himself from the Headquarters of the Government for more than a few days. It was quite impossible for him to carry out effective inspections of the Army, or to supervise adequately the military training of the troops.

The problem of improving this organization was the first to which Haig addressed himself on arrival in India. In a paper which he submitted, he summarized the errors in the existing system as :

1. Lack of clearly defined functions both for the Commander-in-Chief and for his Staff.
2. The dual functions of each individual.
3. Lack of a clear chain of responsibility from the Commander-in-Chief downwards through the principal staff officers to all branches of Army Headquarters.
4. Lack of opportunity for the Commander-in-Chief to acquit himself of his chief duty—the supervision of the training of the Army.

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Full effect was not given to the solution which he outlined. His proposals were that the office of Secretary to the Army Department should be abolished altogether, and that two principal staff officers should be substituted co-equal in rank—one charged with administration and the other charged with policy and military training. Each of these two officers was to have the status of a secretary to the Government of India, but it was proposed to deprive them of direct access to the Viceroy, except as representatives of the Commander-in-Chief and with his authority.

He further proposed that in order to free the Commander-in-Chief from his attendance at the Headquarters of the Government and enable him to supervise the training of his troops, the Chief Administrative Staff Officer should be made a Deputy Member of the Viceroy's Council, acting as such only during the absence of the Commander-in-Chief.

Although these proposals, which closely resembled the recommendations of the Nicholson Committee, were not accepted in full, Haig was able to bring about great improvements in the organization of the Army Headquarters in India. He curtailed the system of long memoranda and notes which had become the recognized system of dealing with problems in all the departments of the Government of India. Prior to Haig's arrival the procedure adopted by the General Staff when submitting their opinions was for the note to be written and signed by one of the junior officers. Each successive senior officer through whose hands it passed appended his initials in token of agreement, until eventually it reached the sanctioning authority. A note submitted in this form by Haig's immediate predecessor was returned to Haig during the early days of his new appointment with the caustic comment in Lord Curzon's neat handwriting: "I rise from the perusal of these papers filled with the sense of the ineptitude of my military advisers." Shortly afterwards Haig introduced the system in force at the War Office at home.

The views of each branch of the Staff—and finally of the General Staff as a whole—were condensed into one authoritative recommendation, replacing the long and often contradictory expressions of individual opinion which had

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previously characterized the administration throughout all departments of the Government of India. He was himself a master of the art of lucid and concise style, and was frankly contemptuous of the circumlocution customary at the time in interdepartmental correspondence within the Government of India and also between India and Whitehall.

As a typical instance of the abuse of words he used to quote an occasion when Whitehall notified their acceptance of a proposal to which they had long offered uncompromising resistance. The phrase ran: "Continuity of policy is not sacrosanct against diversity of circumstance."

In particular he insisted that the work done should be constructive and progressive. When on one occasion an officer submitted to Haig a memorandum, compiled with great pains, with the confident remark, "There at last, Sir, is a note with which everyone must agree," Haig replied, "Then tear it up: if everyone agrees with it it must be sufficiently obvious not to require writing."

He imported into Army Headquarters new blood from home. He brought out from London, to the position of Director of Military Operations, General Hamilton Gordon, who had served under him during most of his time at the War Office, and who became his right-hand man during the whole period of his tenure of the appointment of Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

These improvements in staff organization at Army Headquarters—important and far-reaching though they were—were only subsidiary to the real task of training the Army in India for war. Again he had recourse to the system of Staff Tours. Even before his departure from London, he had sent out to India the scheme for a Staff Tour, with directions that the preliminary work should be prepared, and the officers assembled, so that he could join the Tour immediately he arrived in India.

This Staff Tour was the first of a very remarkable series. A Staff Tour, as carried out under Haig's directions, was very far from being a formal exercise: it required an immense amount of preliminary work. He himself sketched an outline of the particular lessons in military teaching which he wished

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to enforce. Every detail of the actual operations of the army, which the Staff Tour officers were assumed to be directing in the field, was most carefully prepared prior to the Tour. All the minutiae of administration during the period of mobilization and concentration were worked out with the same completeness and fullness as had been devoted to the preparation of the plans for the Expeditionary Force during Haig's time at the War Office.

From the very outset he emphasized the ultimate aim and object of the Staff Tours—the instruction of the Staff in the practical problems of war. “Staff Officers at Army Headquarters, and to a certain extent those at the Headquarters of Divisions, have their time so fully occupied with the question of daily routine and of its problems that little attention is paid to the serious training of men for the actual duties which may devolve upon them either immediately prior to the outbreak of war, or during the progress of operations in the field. . . . These Staff Tours were designed so that, by putting these problems forward month by month, some few of our Staff Officers would be given an opportunity of studying more or less continuously war, and the requirements of the Army and of their own training duties as Staff Officers, for duty during war.”

Each of the Staff Tours was devoted to a definite phase of fighting against a European enemy, and it is remarkable how in each of them Haig foresaw and sought both to learn and to teach the solution of the very problems with which he was subsequently faced during the Great War of 1914-18.

He instituted a close study of the organization of the German Army. He compared the differences between the organization adopted by the Germans and that prevailing in Great Britain and in India. He sought to arrive at a definite decision between the alternative strategical theories of the French and German armies—between envelopment of the flank and penetration of the centre. Above all, he strove to teach that no stereotyped system of strategy could be accepted as invariably the best, or indeed the only, solution of the ever-varying problems which would be presented in the course of modern warfare.

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He foresaw the situation with which the British Army was actually confronted in the early stages of the War in 1914 ; and the whole of one tour was devoted to the problem of how a small force, faced with the advance of an overwhelming enemy, should direct its operations : whether it should accept battle if a favourable but fleeting opportunity offered, or whether it should devote its whole energies to disengaging itself from the threat by a rapid and skilful withdrawal until it could expect a definite and final improvement in the strategical situation.

Haig's conception of the course of armed conflict was already clear. It was not original, but it was based on the most careful study of the operations and the teachings of all the masters of war in history and of all the contemporary leaders of military thought. In words which we find him eight years later repeating almost verbatim to the Cabinet of the Empire, he taught on each one of his Staff Tours that the process of a struggle would go through definite phases :

The manœuvre for position.

The first clash of battle.

The wearing-out fight of varying duration.

And the eventual decisive blow, which would give victory.

Above all, he inculcated the lesson that while armaments, training and numerical superiority were all of great importance, the essential thing was "the spirit"—"the spirit that quickeneth." Determination, will-power, endurance, self-sacrifice were the qualities which would, according to his teaching, eventually decide the conflict. Rapidity of decision, acquired only by training, and even the correctness of the decision swiftly arrived at based on a study of war, were to him adjuncts rather than essentials to ultimate success. He was fond of quoting the old military adage that "any decision—even a bad one—is better than indecision ;" and insisted that any plan, however imperfect, if resolutely executed, would achieve greater success than the best conceived scheme if determination were lacking.

In his Staff Tour of 1911—the last which Haig conducted

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in India—there was the most direct and immediate reference to the German menace. In this Tour he directed the attention of his Staff to the problem of sending a contingent from India overseas to combine with other branches of the Imperial Army in Europe; and some of the words in which he summed up the lessons to be learnt from the study were pregnant with prophecy. “No plan of operations,” he wrote, “can with any safety include more than the first collision with the enemy’s force. . . . Plans aiming far beyond the strategical deployment and first collision have been submitted. Such speculations may become harmful if they are allowed to hamper the judgment as the campaign progresses, and to impede the initiative. Commanders in war have been known to become so imbued with an idea as never to think of any other contingency; and what we wish for we like to hope and believe. . . . Numerical superiority, even in victorious warfare, quickly dwindles away when the victor penetrates into an enemy country.”\*

He was fully conscious of the uncertainty of war, and realized that any attempt at stereotyped strategy would invite disappointment and even disaster. After every war in which Great Britain had been involved there had arisen the criticism that conditions were “abnormal.” Haig believed that future wars would also present similar variations from forecasts and anticipations.

It was this conviction that prompted him in his last Staff Tour to defend the British General Staff against the criticism that they had formulated no definite rules or principles of war.

“Certain critics of the British General Staff and of our regulations have recently argued that a doctrine is lacking. While the German General Staff preaches the doctrine of envelopment, and the French General Staff advocates a large general reserve with a view to a concentrated blow at a decisive point of the enemy’s battle order, the critics urge that the British General Staff hesitates to publish and to teach a clear line of action. The reasoning appears to be that unless some such definite doctrine is decided and inculcated in peace, action in war will be hesitating and mistakes will be made. The critics seem to lose sight of the true nature of war, and of the varied conditions under which the British Army may have to take the field. It is neither

\* “Staff Tour Report, 1911” (p. 40).

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necessary nor desirable that we should go further than what is so clearly laid down in our regulations. If we go further, we run the risk of tying ourselves by a doctrine that may not be always applicable, and we gain nothing in return. An army trained to march long distances, to manœuvre quickly, and to fight with the utmost determination will be a suitable instrument in the hands of a competent commander, whether the situation is to be solved by 'envelopment' or penetration." (Staff Tour Report.)

Haig's view that the Army in India might well be called upon to take part in a new European War found even more direct expression than in the Staff Tours. With six specially selected officers of his Staff, each of whom was bound to the strictest secrecy, he worked out in complete detail a scheme for the employment of an Indian Expeditionary Force on lines analogous to that of the British Expeditionary Force. At the time it was known that the whole policy of the Government of India, and indeed of the Government at home, was based on the definite assumption that in no circumstances would the Army in India be required to serve beyond its own frontiers. So fearful were the Government of offending the susceptibilities of any possible adversary that they would not countenance even the consideration of the possibility of hostilities by the Army Staff. The Viceroy went so far as to inform the Commander-in-Chief that in his opinion the study of foreign army organizations was unnecessary and dangerous, and might prove an incentive to war.

The work which was to prove invaluable in 1914 had to be kept from the knowledge of the civil authorities as well as from potential enemies. As was customary, the new scheme was given a code name: the particular name adopted was "Nathi," from the Hindustani term meaning "Imp"—a contraction of the word "Imperial." Although secrecy was carefully preserved in India, Haig was necessarily in constant correspondence with the General Staff at the War Office in connection with the development of the scheme. Apparently some leakage occurred in England, and it came to the knowledge of the Secretary of State for India\* that a plan

\* Lord Morley.

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for the utilization of Indian troops beyond the frontiers of India was in course of preparation at Simla. The India Office at once telegraphed to the Viceroy, and he in turn issued orders not only that further work on the scheme was to cease, but also that any work completed up to the present time was to be destroyed.

Haig conveyed these orders to the senior officer concerned in the work, Hamilton Gordon ; but, as that officer declared later, "There was a look in Haig's eye which made me realize that he would not regard any deviation from rigid adherence to orders with undue severity." Copies of the scheme were carefully preserved, and were produced from their hiding-place in 1913, when the deepening war cloud in Europe caused the War Office to invite suggestions for the utilization of the Indian Army. It was on the plan which Haig had prepared in 1910 that in 1914 the Indian divisions—so invaluable in France during the early days of the war—were moved from India to France.

The "Nathi" scheme was not the only activity which Haig had foreseen for the Army in India in the event of war. He caused plans to be prepared for operations and expeditions from India to Mesopotamia and East Africa ; it was on these plans that the Indian expeditions moved to the occupation of Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf, and to the capture of Dar-es-Salaam in 1916. In view of the disaster that overtook the Indian force in Mesopotamia during 1915, it is of interest to note that Haig while Chief of the Staff had studied the problem, and arrived at the definite conclusion that unless and until the force had reached a strength of six divisions, and had adopted modern European methods of transport and armament, no advance should be made beyond Basra.

It was not only in schemes for overseas expeditions that Army Headquarters in India was hampered by restrictions imposed by the Government's solicitude for foreign susceptibilities. The most important immediate military problem of the Indian Army was the possibility of hostilities on the frontier against Russia or Afghanistan. Lord Kitchener's scheme for the redistribution of the forces in India was based



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on this contingency : but the Anglo-Russian agreement over Persia had now been concluded, and negotiations were in progress with Afghanistan. The Viceroy accordingly prohibited even the study of the problem of hostilities against Afghanistan. The result was somewhat ludicrous. Haig had decided to devote a Staff Tour to the study of the Afghan problem, and to meet the views of the Viceroy a special map of Afghanistan had to be prepared with Egyptian names substituted for Afghan names. Kabul became Cairo, Jelalabad Alexandria, and similar alterations were made over the whole area.

In spite of these incidents there was no serious friction between the army and the civil authorities. Haig never for a moment allowed himself to overstep the boundary of his legitimate duties. His attitude was invariably correct. If he chafed at the trammels of the financial limitations, it was rare that his force of character and carefully considered arguments failed to secure those financial grants for the Army which he pressed upon the Indian Treasury.

Although his slight knowledge of the language did not enable him to converse freely with the Indians, he possessed that peculiar gift of personal magnetism, found occasionally in Europeans, which compelled the devotion and affection of the Asiatics with whom he was thrown in contact. He had great sympathy with the aspirations of the Indians for a larger share in the government of their own country. Although he never took up the matter officially, in private conversation he frequently referred to the advisability of importing into the Indian Army some system similar to that of the Egyptian Army (in which he had served in his early years), wherein the Indian officer would occupy a position equal in status though junior in rank to that of the British officer in Indian units. The Imperial Service Troops of India, entirely commanded by Indian officers, attracted his particular attention, and he regarded the extension of that system into some of the units of the Indian army as a goal that might be achieved after many years of preparation.

He gathered round him at Army Headquarters a group of young officers, whom he treated with the same cordial

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comradeship that he had extended to the officers of his own regiment in Edinburgh ; and in due course, when the blue ribbon of the British Army was offered to him in the command of the force at Aldershot, he took with him from India officers to be his Assistant Military Secretary\* and his personal A.D.C.†

Strenuous though his work was at Army Headquarters in India, Haig found time to participate in many of the amusements of the hill-capital of India. The mellowing of his character that had begun at the War Office was proceeding apace through his wife's influence. He took to tennis, which he studied with the same assiduity which he devoted to a strategical problem. He played polo regularly at Annandale, and spent many week-ends golfing on the miniature course, perched precariously on the side of a Himalayan mountain at Naldera, a few miles from Simla.

He entertained largely—if not lavishly. A fancy-dress ball had the remarkable result of displaying the reserved and somewhat unbending Chief of the General Staff arrayed as Henry VIII, and to all appearances enjoying himself as much as the youngest of Simla's young staff officers.

He became president of the United Service Club at Simla—one of the best Clubs in the British overseas dominions—and took a great interest in its organization and finance. During his period of office as president and under his direction the whole of the financial arrangements of the Club, which had become somewhat antiquated and precarious, were re-organized and brought up to date. As president he took the chair at a farewell dinner to Lord Minto, and, to the surprise of those who knew him best, made an admirable and amusing after-dinner speech. He recounted incidents of his own earlier career in India ; he traced the developments now in progress, and allowed himself to utter two prophecies. The first was that the Indians would obtain a larger share in the government of their own country, and the second that the Army in India would “weigh in the scales” in any encounter between the armed forces of the world.

There were no signs of the dawning of the deep religious

\* The Author.

† Major-General H. D. Baird.

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belief which marked his later years. He attended the Anglican Church service, but as a matter of duty rather than religious conviction. He never entered the door of the Scottish Church, though during his term of office there was a yearly succession of very able Scottish divines, who by their eloquent sermons filled the picturesque little church to overflowing.

His days were, as always, time-tabled. He was in his office at Army Headquarters by 10 a.m., worked—generally at a standing desk—from then until lunch-time. After lunch he would work for two hours in his study in his own home, then followed exercise—polo, tennis and riding—until dinner-time, and after dinner work again until 10 p.m., when with clockwork regularity he sought his rest.

They were happy days—the responsibility was not unduly great, the work was interesting, and he was extracting a fund of pleasure from his recreation and amusements; but there was always the regret of separation from his family. When late one evening in the autumn of 1911 a decoded telegram from Lord Haldane was brought to him asking: “Would it be agreeable to you to be appointed to the Aldershot Command?” the prospect of a family reunion gave him as much pleasure as the fact that he was being offered the highest command at home in the military hierarchy. Characteristically, his first remark to the officer who brought the decoded telegram to him was: “That could have waited until the morning.” His pleasure, nevertheless, was unfeigned, and his acceptance of the offer prompt.

His last duty in India was to be present at the Durbar at Delhi in the last month of the year, and in February, 1912, he handed over his duties as Chief of the General Staff to Sir Percy Lake,\* and a few weeks later took over his command at Aldershot.

There is a Cassandra at every celebration. When Haig’s principal clerk at Simla bade him farewell, he said mournfully: “Many a man who has been successful in India has come to grief at Aldershot.” Haig’s career at Aldershot, however, was to falsify this gloomy prediction.

\* Lieutenant-General Sir Percy H. N. Lake, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., C.B.

## CHAPTER VII

### ALDERSHOT

IF Haig ever gave a thought at this time to his military career, he must have found every reason for satisfaction. He was still in his fiftieth year, with barely twenty-seven years' service to his credit. At a time when most of his contemporaries were still awaiting the command of their battalions or regiments, he was taking over the greatest active command that Great Britain had to offer, and had been selected in preference to many distinguished soldiers senior to himself, including Sir Herbert Plumer, Sir James Grierson and Sir J. Wolfe-Murray.

He could rest assured of the support and confidence of those to whom he would be responsible. Sir John French, his South African friend and commander, was Inspector-General of the Forces, and it was already known that he would succeed Sir William Nicholson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff at the War Office within a few weeks. Lord Haldane, his former close colleague, was still at the War Office as Secretary of State. Perhaps most important of all from Haig's point of view, the Aldershot appointment meant that in the event of mobilization he would have high command in the British Expeditionary Force.

He had little doubt but that mobilization would not be long delayed. Before leaving India, when he offered the appointments of Assistant Military Secretary and A.D.C. to the officers whom he had selected to accompany him, he had definitely told them that war on the Continent of Europe was—if not inevitable—at least very probable “within three or four years.” This conviction was confirmed by the information which he received on his arrival in England.

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Although satisfied with the progress that had been made in the arrangements for the Expeditionary Force, the unpreparedness of the country as a whole weighed on his mind. He invited Lord Haldane to visit him at Aldershot, and in a very long discussion he emphasized his opinion that the writing was on the wall. Although no one appreciated more keenly than Lord Haldane the trend of opinion in responsible circles in Germany, and the strength of the militarist force within that country, he was not prepared to agree with Haig that war was inevitable. "It is the task of the statesmen of Great Britain to prevent the catastrophe," he said, "and we shall spare no effort to succeed in it." "You will fail," said Haig, "not from lack of effort, but because no nation can prevent another forcing a quarrel to the issue of force, save by intolerable and ignominious concessions."

At the War Office the official advisers—Sir John French, who had assumed office in March as Chief of the Staff, and Col. Henry Wilson, the Director of Military Operations—fully shared Haig's views, and were doing their utmost (though with small effect) to ensure that adequate provision was made to meet the danger.

Haig's task for the time was confined to training the divisions of the Aldershot Command (the 1st and 2nd Divisions and the 1st Cavalry Brigade) to the highest pitch of military efficiency. It was his first experience in active command of large formations. Indeed, with the exception of the short periods with his regiment in Africa and Edinburgh, and in charge of a column in South Africa, he had had no direct command of troops, and the task of succeeding Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien\* was not an easy one. Nor was Haig's reception by the Staff at Aldershot altogether cordial.

There had always existed some friendly rivalry between Aldershot, the centre of military life in Britain, and India. Aldershot taught the latest theories of scientific soldiering, but afforded few opportunities for testing the soundness of those theories in the hard school of war. India provided less scientific training, but her frontiers gave scope for considerable practical experience in warfare.

General Sir Horace L. Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O.

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Aldershot was inclined to view askance the new Commander-in-Chief, most of whose service (with the exception of three years at the War Office) had been spent abroad. His arrival with his personal staff drawn from the Army in India was popularly called the "Hindoo invasion." He knew very few of the officers of the Staff or the commanders of the divisions and brigades personally, and (except in the cavalry) practically none of the commanding officers of the smaller units.

All the senior officers were destined to become famous in subsequent years. General Davies,\* the Chief of the General Staff, was later to command a division and then a Corps in France, and to finish his active service as G.O. Commander-in-Chief of the Scottish Command.

General Robb,† the head of the administrative staff, was later to be the Inspector-General of the lines of communication in France. General Lomax, commanding the 1st Division, was to be one of Haig's most capable Divisional Commanders during those anxious months of 1914, and was mortally wounded at the first Battle of Ypres. General Lawson, commanding the 2nd Division, was subsequently to become Sir H. M. Lawson.‡ Col. Rice,§ Chief Engineer, afterwards Sir S. R. Rice, was to hold the appointment of Engineer-in-Chief of the British Army for the greater part of Haig's period of command in France. Most distinguished of all was Col. H. S. Horne—now Lord Horne—Staff Officer for Artillery, who was to play an important part throughout the Great War and to whose lot it fell to deal one of the most successful blows in 1918. With the exception of Davies and Horne, all these officers remained under Haig's command at Aldershot until the outbreak of war.

Haig threw himself into his new work with all his usual energy and thoroughness, and his personality soon asserted itself. There were no radical changes in the system of training; it was not a case of a "new broom" making violent

\* General Sir Francis John Davies, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O.

† Lieutenant-General Sir F. S. Robb, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O.

‡ Lieutenant-General Sir H. M. Lawson, K.C.B.

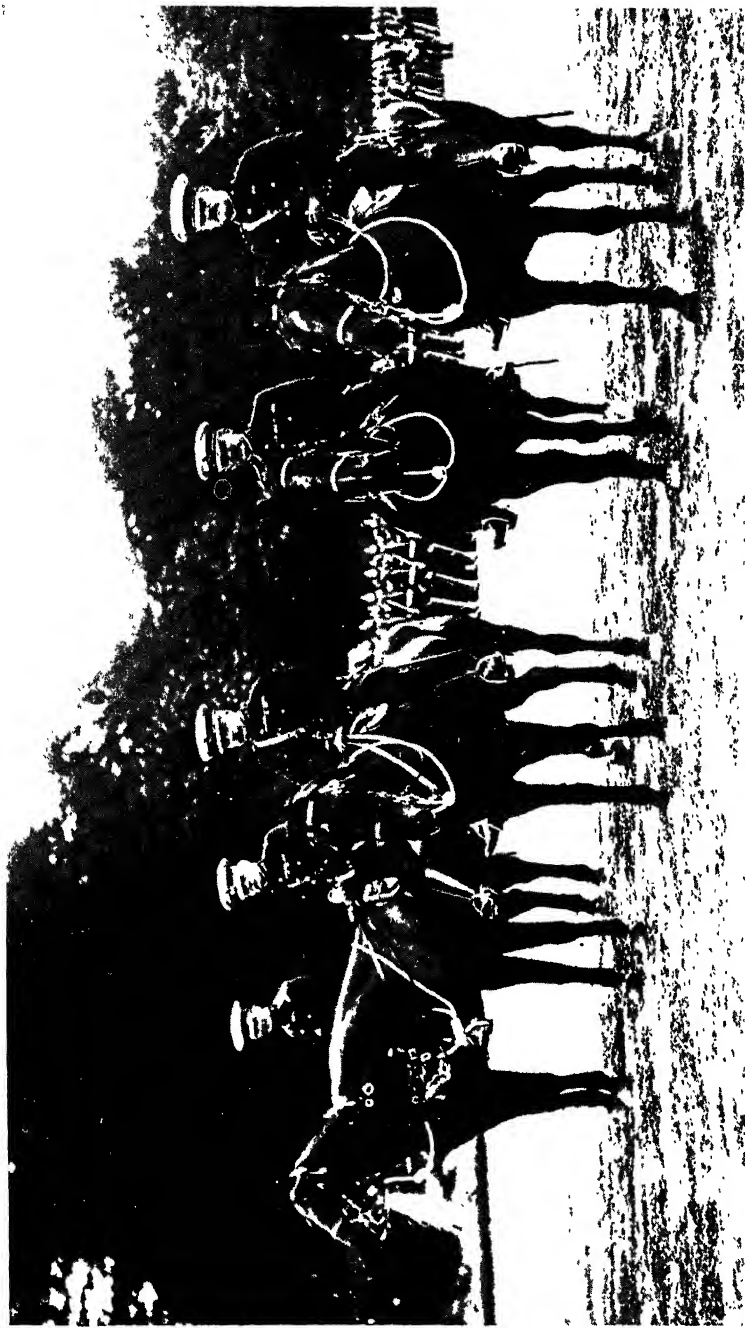
§ Major-General Sir S. R. Rice, K.C.M.G., C.B.

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alterations; but there was no detail with which Haig did not speedily acquaint himself. There were not the facilities for instruction by Staff Tours as in India. He could only draw upon the limited number of Staff Officers in the Command, instead of the whole of the Army in India; and the time of the Staff Officers was already fully occupied with the arduous work of high-pressure training then in force at Aldershot. Haig did, however, find time for one Staff Tour each year, and this he directed—and now with more immediate prospect of seeing his work of training realized in war—to the study of the German problem.

The setting was as congenial as the work. For the first time in his married life he was settled in a real home. Government House, if not palatial, was spacious, and in those pre-war days it stood in country surroundings. Happy in the reunion with his family, Haig set himself to the just admixture of the life of a serving officer and a country gentleman. His private means, though not great, were sufficient to enable him to meet the demands on his income. He entertained frequently, but not extravagantly. For the great functions which had been a feature of many of his predecessors' entertainments he substituted smaller and more intimate gatherings, which brought him into closer personal touch with the officers under him. There were not many of those who served under Haig who did not at one time or another have an opportunity of making themselves known to the "Chief" within his own home. Haig was an admirable host. With his guests the barrier which he rigidly preserved in all official dealings was temporarily down.

Golf replaced polo as his chief means of physical exercise. His attack on the citadel of golf was characteristic. He spared no pains to conquer its difficulties. He was determined to succeed. He took lessons from a professional. He practised assiduously. Each stroke was treated as a separate and all-important problem. He was not content until he felt that he had acquired the utmost proficiency within his scope. His ball never left the fairway. His play was as consistent as that of Colonel Bogey himself. If his official handicap was never very low, he was a most difficult opponent to beat.



CAPTAIN BAIRD, GENERAL ROBB, SIR DOUGLAS HAIG, GENERAL DAVIES, CAPTAIN CHARTERIS  
SIR DOUGLAS HAIG AND STAFF AT ALDERSHOT





## ALDERSHOT

One peculiarity became pronounced at this period of his life. Though still in perfect physical health and in the prime of life, he became obsessed with a dislike—almost amounting to horror—of the approach of old age and of infirmity. Special diets appealed strongly to him, and he would devote himself assiduously to every one which attracted his notice. “Sour milk,” “whole meal bread” and “Sanatogen,” each in turn had its trial.

His inability to express his thought through the spoken word was still pronounced. On one occasion at a Staff Conference a very eloquent General made a highly polished but iconoclastic speech. Haig’s indignation made him practically inarticulate; he rose to his feet to reply, hesitated, and then ejaculated, “You old destructor,” and sat down. Even these three brief words, however, so accurately expressed the feelings of the rest of the audience that the “speech,” according to another officer who was present, evoked a burst of applause.

On another occasion when called on without warning to present the prizes at an inter-regimental cross-country race, the “Chief,” to the consternation of his Staff, addressed the successful team with the words: “I congratulate you on your running. You have run well. I hope you will run as well in the presence of the enemy.”

Later in 1912, at the final conference on the army manœuvres, the same failing manifested itself to a wider and more important audience. The manœuvres ended near Cambridge, and the conference took place in the great hall of Trinity College. All the most distinguished officers of the Army and many of the dignitaries of the University were present, and H.M. the King himself presided. Haig had been opposed in the manœuvres by Sir James Grierson, and the two Commanders were called on to describe and explain their operations.

Although Haig had written out a clear and convincing statement of his views, and held the paper in his hand throughout the Conference, he did not refer to it when he spoke, but to the dismay of his staff attempted to extemporize. In the effort he became totally unintelligible and unbearably

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dull. The University dignitaries soon fell fast asleep. Haig's friends became more and more uncomfortable; only he himself seemed totally unconscious of his failure.

A listener, without other and deeper knowledge of the ability and personality of the Aldershot Commander-in-Chief, could not but have left the conference with the impression that Haig had neither ability nor military learning. Fortunately the men in responsible positions knew better. Those who were present at Cambridge had little difficulty in later years in realizing why it was that politicians, who are apt to judge men more by their gifts of speech than by their deeds, found it difficult to appreciate Haig's real worth.

With this solitary exception there was little in these years at Aldershot (1911-13) to disturb the even and pleasant tenor of life. In his work there was nothing to give Haig cause for anxious thought. The questions with which he had to deal were in the main trivial and even petty in comparison with those of former and of future years. He viewed with some misgivings the growing tendency of the younger officers to seek their relaxation in dancing rather than more virile exercise. He even went so far as to throw the weight of his influence against the *Thés Dansants* which were introduced at the Officers' Club. The difficulty which young married officers experienced in balancing their accounts was investigated with patient and sympathetic care, and he urged the authorities to grant a marriage allowance.

The annual "Search-light Tattoo"—now so prominent a feature of the social life of London—had been initiated in a small way by his predecessor. On Haig's initiative it was expanded into a form very similar to that existing at the present time, and the proceeds were put into a fund for the benefit of military charities.

He followed with great interest the gradual development of the air service. The "Air Battalion"—the forerunner of the Air Force—was established at Aldershot. Experimental work was proceeding, though there was little sign of the great developments so soon to follow, while on Laffan's Plain Mr. Cody, in his rule-of-thumb aeroplane, nicknamed the "Cathedral," made precarious and thrilling flights. Fame

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is always illusory. When an A.D.C. brought to Cody the information that "General Haig would like to see him," Cody replied, "And who is General Haig?—I have never heard of him, but I have no doubt he has heard much of me."

Haig himself felt that the period was only a breathing space. Abroad the tension between the Great Powers was perceptibly increasing. The Agadir incident in 1911 came like a bolt from the blue, and was succeeded by an increase in the armed strength of both France and Germany. Almost equally suddenly the Bulgar-Turkish War broke out in the Balkans in 1912; and by the end of the year the relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia had become as strained as those between France and Germany during the Agadir incident in 1911.

The Conference of Ambassadors in London in December, 1912, had eased matters; but the sensitive poise of international peace was again emphasized by the commotion caused by the Montenegrin occupation of Scutari. This particular incident passed without active hostilities, but a few months later the Balkans were again set ablaze by the outbreak of war between Bulgaria and the dual alliance of Serbia and Greece.

By the end of the year the Committee of Imperial Defence was discussing (at the request of the War Office) the problem of war either between England and Germany or between the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance. Haig was in close touch with affairs in the Balkans, and with the discussion of the Committee of Imperial Defence. He had sent one of his own Staff Officers to the Balkans, and both from him and from Major Philip Howell (who was deeply interested in the Balkans) he received full information of developments in the Near East.

At the close of 1913, however, it appeared as if all the trouble had blown over, and in Great Britain—even in official circles—the prospect of war seemed more remote than at any time during the present century.

The year 1914 opened for Haig with no cloud on the horizon. He was more than usually happy in his work. The Army at Aldershot was his plaything. He was surrounded by friends: a Staff whom he trusted and liked were there, and

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he was still rejoicing in the reunion with his family after a period of foreign service.

The days passed evenly. The early hours of the morning he spent on horseback, supervising the training of the units of his command: when the inspection was over, he would indulge in a sharp gallop across country and took a mischievous pleasure in evading the staff officer and escort who accompanied him. Riding either alone or with one companion, ahead of the others, and with perfect knowledge of every inch of the ground, he would suddenly increase his pace, make an abrupt turn, taking advantage of either a fold of the ground or a path through one of the spinneys, and if those behind failed to follow, he would be delighted. But when, often after a long search, they succeeded in rejoining him, there was always the same question with quite unmoved face: "Did you not see which way I went?" Only those who were long with him knew of the pleasure this little amusement afforded him, and in France they would seek to lighten his burden of anxiety by purposely allowing him to succeed in evading them. At eleven o'clock he reached his office at Army Headquarters and worked there until lunch-time. From lunch to tea was play-time—either golf, or tennis, as the days grew warmer—or sometimes he preferred the rôle of onlooker and watched the games of some section of the Command. After tea two hours were devoted to reading, and this brought his day's work to a close. The hours after dinner were spent with his household, which comprised, in addition to his family, his immediate personal staff, his military secretary and his A.D.C.'s. There were the usual number of official dinners to officers in his Command—generally two each week. There were occasional visits of distinguished guests from London, and these included many of high standing in the political world. Haig, however, took little interest in politics: they savoured too much of intrigue to him. He listened to the conversation of politicians with momentary interest, but it was the same interest that he would take in an article on ancient history; he had no concern as to the outcome of their actions and activities.

Haig's reading was varied but not deep. He had strangely

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little learning ; his military work absorbed him, and he only glanced at other subjects, never studied them. His favourite reading was the monthly reviews ; he read few books and never a single novel. To those who even then appreciated the power of his mind and the soundness of his judgment it was a matter of constant wonder that events outside his immediate task could stir his interest so little. He had not a critical mind. An article in a review was accepted by him as the final standard. His mental attitude in his miscellaneous reading was much the same as that of a theatre-goer on a first night : he would be interested, his attention for the time being would be engaged, and he would store extracts in his memory, but no profound impression was made, and he was never impelled to delve deeper into the subject.

With military matters it was totally different ; here his reading was deep and voracious. He could read French military writings with complete ease, though at this time his general knowledge of the French language was of the slightest, and he could hardly speak a consecutive sentence. His knowledge of German was even more rudimentary ; to read a German article—even on military matters—was to him a labour, and his practice was to glance through it, mark the parts which seemed to him important, and have them translated by one or other of his staff officers.

In the actual work of his Command his chief interest lay in training. The system of a separate administrative officer, with a measure of independent responsibility (which Haig had himself designed at the War Office), relieved him of administrative details ; and although he kept himself informed of all such work in progress in the Command, it took up little of his time. Only the final responsibility was his, and he was there prepared to accept it.

In training no detail escaped his notice, and very few of the plans and schemes of training, even down to those of units, were not seen and examined by him personally. He took great pains to study the personal character of the officers under his command. He had not a good memory for faces but he never forgot names, and his judgment of character remained in his mind connected with names and not

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features. He looked to his personal staff officers to supplement this deficiency. But there were few officers of the Aldershot command down to the company commanders whom Haig did not know by name and whose character and ability he had not summed up. He would spend an hour watching a company at its training work, occasionally exchanging a few sentences with the officers in charge but never interfering. Such criticisms as he had to offer he made only to the commanders directly responsible to himself.

There was an incident which was long remembered at Aldershot, and which gives a good illustration of Haig's methods. Aldershot, like the rest of the country, was afflicted by excessive cigarette smoking. Exhortations and orders were issued, but appeared to have little effect in reforming the abuse. At an outpost a sentry—in what he believed to be safe seclusion—was indulging in a cigarette, when suddenly there appeared Haig with his Staff and escort. The man hastily threw his cigarette on the ground, where it lay emitting a thin column of smoke. Haig said nothing to the sentry, but stopped alongside the cigarette.

He sat motionless on his horse, his face set like a flint, and watched the smoke ascend, until the last trace of the cigarette was reduced to ashes. The sentry—equally immobile—stood stiffly to attention, but the perspiration of anxiety or despair streamed down his face. When the last vestige of smoke had disappeared, Haig rode off without a word. There were no more cases of smoking while on duty.

The calm at Aldershot reflected the calm which at the time had settled over the whole of the European situation. During the early months of 1914, for the first time for many years, there was no cloud on the horizon of Europe, and the serenity of Aldershot was to be disturbed not by events on the Continent but by the march of political affairs in Ireland. The Parliament Act had been passed, and the imminent passage of the Home Rule Bill was therefore a certainty. Ulster was preparing to resist by force, and had declared her intention of setting up a provisional government.

The War Office felt some anxiety about a few isolated military stations in Northern Ireland. There were artillery

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batteries without infantry garrisons, and small stores of military material with no adequate protection. The Government shared the anxiety of the War Office, and a battle squadron and flotilla were ordered to Lamlash Bay by the First Lord of the Admiralty as a precautionary measure.

Meantime at the War Office, a conference, including the Secretary of State for War and the Chief of the General Staff (Sir John French), was considering the situation. General Paget,\* Commander of the troops in Ireland, was present. In the course of the discussion he suggested casually that if the Army was ordered to move against Ulster the officers might decline to obey. The suggestion was treated as casually as it was made, Sir John French remarking that any officer who refused to obey orders would have to leave the service. No one else at the conference attached any importance to the incident, and the meeting proceeded to further business.

Shortly afterwards the authorities in London were startled by a telegram from General Paget reporting that officers in his command had definitely stated that they would prefer resignation to hostilities against Ulster, and fifty-six officers, including Hubert Gough,† had already submitted their resignations. There was great commotion in the Government. The Chief of the General Staff and the Adjutant-General (Sir Spencer Ewart) were hastily summoned to No. 10 Downing Street, and tendered the sensible advice that since some misunderstanding had arisen the wisest procedure would be to summon the chief officers to London and obtain an explanation.

On their arrival at the War Office, it was ascertained that General Paget had assembled the officers at the Curragh, and had confronted them with the same hypothetical question that had been raised at the Conference, but without first stating that there was no immediate intention of moving troops against Ulster. When the circumstances had been clearly explained to the officers concerned, they expressed themselves satisfied, and the whole incident seemed to be

\* The late General Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur H. F. Paget, G.C.B., G.C.V.O.

† General Sir Hubert de la Poer Gough, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., K.C.V.O.



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closed. A few hours later, however, General Gough asked for a written statement to show to his officers. As this seemed a reasonable request both to the military authorities and to the Secretary of State for War (to whom it was referred), the Adjutant-General was directed to draft the requisite letter. Sir Spencer Ewart complied in a brief document of three paragraphs, which he sent to the Secretary of State for approval and sanction. It returned unsigned, but with two further paragraphs added, stating definitely that the Army would not be used for the coercion of Ulster.

Realizing that a statement of Government policy required signature by a responsible minister, the Chief of the General Staff and the Adjutant-General once more submitted the revised document to the Secretary of State. It was returned with his initials appended. Thereupon the Chief of the General Staff and the Adjutant-General added their signatures, and the document was given to General Gough—marked “Confidential.” Only a single copy was retained in London, but secrecy during a political crisis is difficult to preserve. The purport of the document\* appeared in the Press, and immediately there arose a political storm.

Haig was at the time at Littlehampton with his family on a brief holiday. The first news that he received of the crisis was a message from General John Gough, his own Chief of Staff, giving an account of the events at the Curragh and submitting his own resignation. Haig immediately appreciated the gravity of the situation. Either General Paget had had authority to offer his officers the alternative—in which case there was a great risk of the Army disintegrating, or he had exceeded his powers—in which case it looked as though some section of the Army was endeavouring to influence Government policy; and this to Haig constituted the gravest breach of discipline.

He declined to forward John Gough's resignation, and proceeded forthwith to London to place his views and experience at the service of his old friend, Lord Haldane, now Lord Chancellor. His advice was clear and decisive. Only one step could correct the evil effects on the Army of

\* It was subsequently issued as a White Paper.

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an incident which had become public property. The Government must submit a clear and unequivocal statement of policy. Haig warned Lord Haldane that if the Army was ordered to move against Ulster, while it would be the duty of every serving officer to obey, numerous officers would seek to resign the service, and if war supervened the Army might break in the hands of the Government.

On the other hand, if the Government had no intention of coercing Ulster, then a resolute declaration would restore the confidence of the Army, and effective steps would be taken to prevent a recurrence of the Curragh incident. Two days later Lord Haldane, in the House of Lords, made his speech concluding with the statement that "No orders were issued, no orders are likely to be issued, and no orders will be issued for the coercion of Ulster."

Once more the whole incident seemed at an end, but on the following day the Prime Minister qualified the Lord Chancellor's statement, and in effect repudiated the document bearing the signatures of the Secretary of State for War, the Chief of the General Staff and the Adjutant-General. If a signature officially appended is officially repudiated, resignation is the obvious and well-nigh the only course, and the Secretary of State for War forthwith submitted his resignation, which was declined by the Prime Minister.

The positions of the Chief of the General Staff and the Adjutant-General differed from that of their political Chief. Sir Spencer Ewart broached the question to Haig and consulted him as to his future course of action. Haig's advice was emphatic. The Army could not and would not trust a member of the Army Council who retained office under the existing circumstances. Influenced by Haig's advice, but even more by his own strict sense of honour, Sir Spencer Ewart tendered his resignation, and adhered to his decision despite the pressure which was brought to bear on him. French and Ewart had throughout acted in accord, and their resignations were followed by that of the Secretary of State for War.

The military crisis was passed. The resignations of the Minister for War and of the two principal military members

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of the Army Council—Sir John French and Sir Spencer Ewart—had political results, but did not excite the attention of the Army as a whole.

At Aldershot affairs resumed their normal course. Manœuvres were impending. The new scheme of mobilization had just been completed at the War Office after three years of concentrated work, and on its issue to Commands it had to be examined and tested. In normal times life at Aldershot stands strangely isolated from the ordinary life of the nation: Aldershot is a community apart, with separate interests and separate ambitions. It is only in the world of sport that it is closely linked with outside movements.

Into the peace and even trend of life in the Command events of international importance were about to break—events which finally destroyed the aloof seclusion of that small exclusive community.

## CHAPTER VIII

### 1914—TO END OF RETREAT

THE news of the murder of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo on June 29th shocked British public opinion, but it did not excite or alarm it. Even in political circles in London there was no conception that it was the distant flash of lightning that heralded the storm.

At Aldershot, except in Government House itself, it passed almost unnoticed. Haig's attention, however, had been closely drawn to the Balkans in 1911-12. He had despatched officers on leave from Aldershot to follow the progress of the Balkan Wars in 1912. He had never rid his mind of a fear of the threat of a European War, and on the day that the news of the murder of the Archduke reached him in the Press he required from his Staff an appreciation of its probable effects on the delicately balanced situation in Eastern Europe. The paper submitted to him arrived at the conclusion that there was little possibility of anything more serious than hostilities between Austria and Serbia—and that even this contingency was improbable. Serbia was exhausted by the war of 1912, and the concert of Europe would prevent any general conflagration. Haig was not convinced. With deep and concentrated attention he followed the meagre news as it appeared from day to day in the Press. To his immediate friends he frequently referred to the prospect of a great continental war originating from the Balkan trouble.

If the War Office and the Foreign Office made investigations, their conclusions must have been similar to those of Haig's Staff, for there is no record of any special interest

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being focused upon the developments of the affair in official circles in London. Attention was still riveted on Ireland and the Irish problem. Statesmen and politicians were striving to find some method of conciliation and compromise, and their efforts culminated in the abortive Conference convened by the King at Buckingham Palace on July 20th.

Five days later—nearly four weeks after the murder—the War Office appears for the first time to have given serious thought to the possible outcome of the Balkan tragedy. The world now knows that exactly three weeks previously the Kaiser had warned General von Falkenhayn (then in high military office in Germany), that “The German Army should be ready for all emergencies.”

If the British Military Authorities were twenty days behind the German Army in their warning, the Aldershot Command was not caught unprepared. Mobilization had been tested; training had been brought to a high pitch of perfection; the Staff had worked together for several years; over all there was a Commander-in-Chief trusted alike by officers and men.

On July 29th Aldershot received the first official war message; the Government had ordered the “precautionary period”—the first step in the transformation of the nation from peace to war; but it was a warning only. Training continued. Preparations for manœuvres and territorial training still had to be carried on. It was not until August 2nd, when Russia, Austria, Germany and France had ordered their mobilization, that these peace exercises were finally cancelled. On August 3rd Germany declared war on France and on August 4th on Belgium. At five o'clock on the afternoon of the same day Aldershot received the long expected orders for the mobilization of the British Army.

Meantime in London there was uncertainty and indecision. War had broken out, but how was war to be waged? There was no accepted plan. The discussions which had taken place between the French and the British General Staffs had been informal, and were in no sense binding on the Government

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of Great Britain. There had been equally informal discussions between the British naval and military authorities, but there had been no co-ordinated plan of war. The whole responsibility rested on the Cabinet, and the Cabinet could not even make up its mind whether the Expeditionary Force should go abroad to fight or remain at home.

To assist it to a decision, Mr. Asquith, on August 5th, called a Council of War. He summoned to meet the Cabinet the most distinguished soldiers—both active and retired—of the nation: Lord Roberts, Lord Kitchener (who was then in England on leave from Egypt), Sir Charles Douglas (Sir John French's successor as Chief of the General Staff), General Henry Wilson (the Director of Military Operations at the War Office), Sir John French, who was nominated to the Command of the Expeditionary Force; Sir Douglas Haig and Sir James Grierson, who had been chosen to command the two Corps into which the Expeditionary Force was subdivided; and Sir Ian Hamilton, Inspector-General of the Overseas Forces.\*

Haig's views had not altered since 1908. The forces of the Empire should fight where both naval and military strength could be brought to bear, and he took with him to the Council a memorandum which he had prepared on the various possibilities of employing the British Force in Flanders. He knew that the plan arranged by the British and French War Offices was that the British Force should align itself on the left flank of the French with a view to a general advance; but he did not share the optimistic view prevailing at both War Offices, that the French would at once be able to seize the initiative, and that the war would be waged in German territory. He realized the difficulty and danger of any alteration made in a plan at the eleventh hour, but there were new factors, unforeseen at the time of the conclusion of the understanding with France, and these might impel a change of arrangements. Italy was neutral and Belgium was at war on the Allied side.

He was fully alive to the advantages of bringing the largest available fighting force into action at the earliest possible

\*With the exception of Sir Ian Hamilton, all the soldiers who attended this conference, only 14 years ago, have passed away.

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moment ;\* but on the other hand, if the Germans succeeded in seizing the initiative, as he believed they would, the possibility that the British and Belgian Armies might be more effective and more secure in a flank position than involved in a general retreat through France could not be disregarded.

At a conference of amateurs and experts it is inevitable that the expression of personal opinions should predominate and exclude reasoned logical arguments, and that discussion should follow many side issues ; this conference proved no exception. The Prime Minister, after a few brief introductory sentences, sought to focus the discussion on two points : where the Expeditionary Force should be placed in line of battle, and where it should concentrate on arrival in France. At once one of the representatives of the Admiralty raised the question whether the whole of the British Army—small as it was—could be safely sent abroad. The Navy would not guarantee complete immunity from all danger of a German invasion of Britain, and it seemed sound policy to retain some regular troops to meet this peril. Athwart the discussion on this point, the War Office authorities brought to light the hard and incontestable fact that the Government's economy campaign of the last few years had resulted in a marked deficiency of equipment. At most not more than four divisions could be fully equipped.

Those who are accustomed to political conferences in peace time will have little difficulty in picturing the course of the discussion, and its futility.

Haig had little patience with such rambling discussions. Opinions which were not founded on solid facts and built up by reasoned arguments did not weigh with him. The problem was no new one to him. Both in his Staff Tours in India and in repeated discussions with his immediate staff officers he had probed it to its depth. He held that the essential feature was the relative fighting efficiency of the French and German armies, taking due note of their respec-

\* In Sir John French's book "1914," it is stated that Sir Douglas Haig at this Conference advocated the retention of the British Army at home for a period of some months, until it could be brought to a greater strength. This is not the case.

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tive size, equipment and moral. He was not convinced that the French Army unaided would be able to make head against the full weight of the German onslaught. He fully realized the great moral support that the prompt arrival of even a small British force would lend to the French nation. On the other hand, if the British Expeditionary Force found itself swept into the vortex of crushing defeat it would be practically impossible to organize the vast resources of the British Empire into fighting shape. He had no belief in the opinion, so firmly expressed in Germany, France and Great Britain, that a prolonged war was impossible under modern economic conditions. Great Britain and Germany would be fighting for their very existence, each backed by great resources which would take long to develop and still longer to exhaust. Neither would readily admit the impossibility of victory. In Haig's view the war would be a matter not of weeks or months but of years. From the British point of view, therefore, the Expeditionary Force must be regarded only as an advance guard, and nothing but necessity could justify risking its annihilation in an initial debacle.

If the Expeditionary Force were moved into line with the French Army such a state of affairs might well arise. If, on the other hand, it joined the Belgian Army in a flank position based upon the Channel Ports it might render assistance to the French more effectively than by direct interposition.

But a change of plan at the eleventh hour must mean grave confusion and delay. Haig took with him from Aldershot the outline of certain fundamental questions, and on their answers he believed that the final decision must be based :

1. If the British Expeditionary Force did not move at once overseas would the French be decisively beaten?
2. If the British Expeditionary Force did move to the concentration area proposed by the War Office would its assistance suffice to avert such defeat ?
3. If the British Force joined the Belgian Army in a flank position could the Germans divert from their main attack against the French sufficient troops to defeat



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it in detail? Or alternatively could the Anglo-Belgian Army so situated operate actively against the enemy's flank?

Haig subsequently informed his staff that he propounded these questions more or less in the form in which he had taken them from Aldershot, and had eventually given as his opinion that whatever might be the theoretical advantages of any of the alternatives the immediate danger was that, with an army and nation of moral so sensitive as the French, the Alliance itself might be endangered by alterations involving delay, and that therefore the Expeditionary Force must move in its greatest possible strength at the earliest possible moment, and conform to the plans of the French Command in the initial stages of the war.

The ultimate decision of the Council (whose deliberations extended over three days) was that two divisions of the Expeditionary Force were to be retained at home, partly owing to the danger of a raid, but mainly because of inadequate equipment; four divisions and one cavalry division were to proceed at once to France; the Imperial troops from South Africa were to be brought home; and two divisions from India were to move to Egypt—but no further. It was also decided that India should be asked to undertake certain minor operations at the head of the Persian Gulf and in East Africa, which had been planned and prepared by Haig himself when Chief of the Imperial General Staff in India (see p. 57).

In his Diary Sir Henry Wilson gives a scathing description of the proceedings of this conference. In a few graphic sentences he depicts the confusion and indecision reigning in the minds of soldiers and statesmen alike. He refers to "the ridiculous proposals of Sir John French," "the desultory talk on strategy," and the ignorance of those who believed "that Liège was in Holland." He sums up his account with the satirical remark: "An historic meeting of men mostly ignorant of their subject."

Though the conference in many respects deserved Wilson's caustic comments, it served a useful purpose. It decided on a course of action, and, whether that action was correct or

incorrect, at least it produced some measure of order. There had been grave danger that the Expeditionary Force would be kept in England, and the French left to bear the whole brunt of the German attack. That danger—and there can be little doubt but that it would have given the Germans victory—was avoided.

A few years before, Foch when asked what was the minimum British force which the French would accept, had replied: "One man; and we will take good care that he is killed." Quite apart from the fighting value of the Expeditionary Force, the presence of British troops gave the French nation and army that moral support without which they would have been overwhelmed by the demoralizing memories of 1870 and the onslaught of the German Army.

For those who were to play great parts in the history of their country and of Europe during the next four years the Council may have fulfilled another purpose. It was an introduction to the stern realities of war, when mistakes cannot be concealed by words, and when retribution is exacted alike for procrastination and for faulty judgment.

To Haig the Council gave the opportunity to urge and enforce the conviction to which he, and he alone of the great soldiers of the day, gave utterance, that the war would be a matter of years, and not of weeks and months.

His contention passed almost unnoticed at the conference, but immediately the meeting adjourned Haig and Kitchener proceeded together to the War Office to interview the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. General Douglas was not available, and for an hour Haig and Kitchener were closeted together at the War Office. Haig continued to press home on the Secretary of State his view that the war would last for years, that a great national army was essential, and that that great army should be built upon the foundation of the Territorial Force, which Haldane and Haig together had brought into being.

It may be that Lord Kitchener himself had already formed the same opinion as to the course and length of the war: no one can say. At least one point appears certain, that it was Haig alone who voiced it at the conference.

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It was eminently characteristic of him that never, either in public statement, or in published document, did he seek to claim any share in the credit of a prophecy fulfilled.

The conference over, Haig returned to Aldershot, there to spend the few days which remained before the embarkation of his force. On Sunday, 9th August, he went to Southampton and established the Headquarters of his Corps at the Dolphin Hotel, returning himself to Government House the same evening. There followed a visit by the King and Queen to bid farewell to their Army. On August 13th Haig left Aldershot for the Front.

Although he gave no perceptible sign, he was a prey to grave anxiety. He doubted the suitability both of Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief, and Sir Archibald Murray, his Chief Staff Officer, and these doubts were founded on a careful appreciation of the personalities of these two men. He had served with Sir John French in South Africa and realized both his qualities and his limitations. He knew him to be courageous and determined, but he did not think that French's military knowledge was sufficiently thorough, and he feared lest he should not be able to develop an even judgment. He had noticed in manœuvres that Sir John French did not appear to have grasped the conditions of modern warfare, and that he was impatient of advice. When Sir James Grierson—his Chief Staff Officer at manœuvres—had pointed out to French the impracticability of some of his proposals, he had at once been replaced by Sir Archibald Murray. He realized that Murray was a highly trained and very able officer, but he feared that he might acquiesce too readily in the proposals of the Commander-in-Chief—even when he disagreed with them.

Nor did Henry Wilson, who was Murray's chief assistant, inspire Haig with confidence. He had a high opinion of General Wilson's intellectual agility, but he did not trust his judgment. Wilson had fallen under the influence of the French General Staff Officers—and, indeed, of the French nation. His temperament was almost Latin in its principal qualities. He would expound arguments in favour of a course which appealed to him, and was never ready to test

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these arguments by the hard logic of established facts. Haig was well aware of the personal ambition which dominated his mind. His career at the War Office had thrown Wilson into close contact with politicians, and he had begun to apply political methods, savouring always of opportunism, to military problems.

Yet Haig, though he could not rid his mind of these anxieties, which sprang from his knowledge of the characters of those in high command, had no doubt of his own duty. He determined that he would act in every way as a loyal subordinate, notwithstanding his doubts of the competence of the Commander-in-Chief and Higher Staff. Nor did his doubts blind him to the merits of those whom he criticized. They had, he said, many good qualities, though not fully fitted for the responsibilities they would have to shoulder.

The area of concentration selected for the Expeditionary Force was near Le Cateau—sixty miles east of Amiens—a position which Haig himself considered at the time too far advanced.

On August 14th the two Corps Commanders and their Staffs crossed from Southampton to Le Havre in a small Union liner—the *Combrie Castle*. It was an unpretentious introduction for the future Commander-in-Chief to the theatre of war, for the *Combrie Castle* had no passenger accommodation. The ship's officers gave up their cabins to the two Generals and their Chiefs of Staff—the remainder of the Staffs of the Army Corps bivouacking on deck. The ship could not provide meals; the only food that most of the officers could obtain for the thirteen hours of the voyage were some "picnic" provisions, hastily collected at Southampton prior to embarkation. Haig himself was more fortunate, for Lady Haig with practical forethought had provided him with a well-stocked luncheon basket.

A few days more and the whole of the Expeditionary Force had completed the crossing and the orders were received for the march forward from the concentration area.

On the train carrying him from Le Havre to Amiens, Haig's anxiety was increased by the news of the sudden death

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of Sir James Grierson—a close personal friend of many years' standing, and a soldier in whose military ability Haig had great confidence.

The two Corps Commanders were proceeding on August 17th by train from Havre to Amiens, when Haig was called to the telephone at the wayside station of Sergueux to be told that Grierson had died suddenly in the train immediately following his own.

Meanwhile, the stage was being set for the first clash of arms. The great armies of France and Germany, with the advantage of several days' start over the British force, were hastening to the frontier.

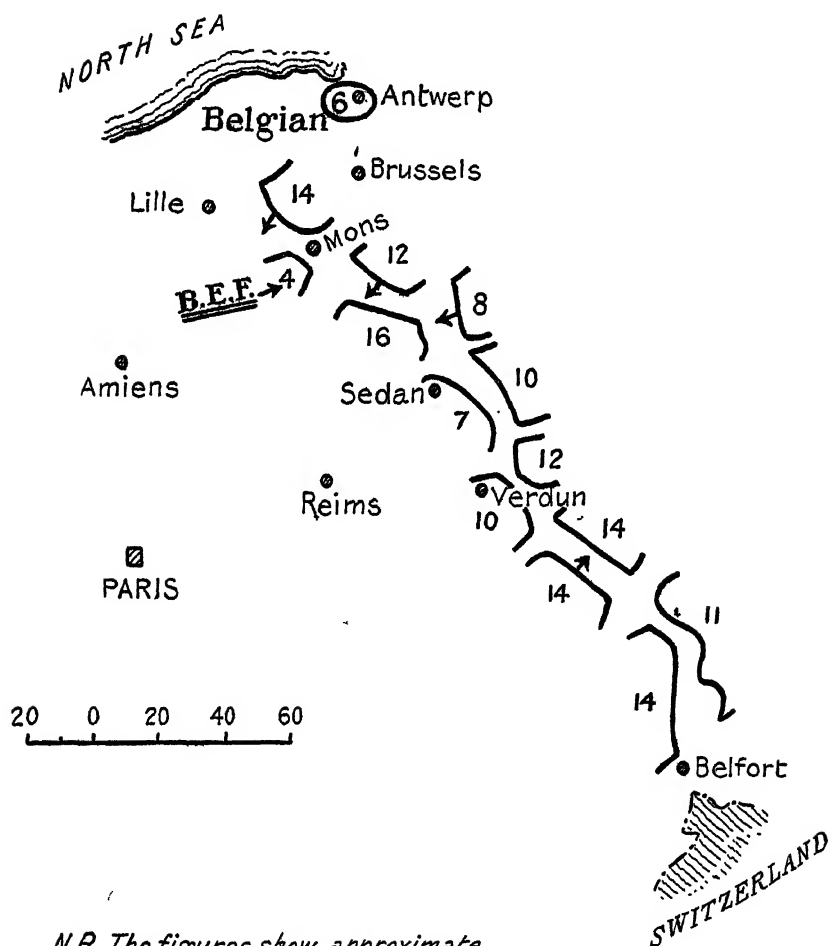
Each was seeking to force its way into the enemy territory. The French arranged their forces in five great armies, stretching in a long line from Switzerland to the Meuse. Originally there had been two alternative deployments.

In the first, one army was to be held in reserve near the centre to deliver the decisive blow when opportunity offered ; in the second, all five armies were to be in line ; but in both plans the position of the miniature British Expeditionary Force was on the extreme left of the French. The German plan was for an advance in great strength round the north flank of the French and British Armies, to envelop and turn them, and then drive the Allied forces back on to the centre of France.

By 2nd August, French General Headquarters arrived at a decision between the alternative plans. The five armies were to be in line. By 8th August, General Joffre appears to have reached the definite conclusion that the German main armies were concentrating in the area Metz-Thionville, and that the main German blow would come from that direction. By 15th August, however, there arrived at French General Headquarters the news that a German force in great strength were crossing the Meuse near Vizé, and the next day General Joffre was forced to revise his judgment. It was established beyond any possibility of doubt that seven or eight German corps were seeking to turn his north flank, and with this object were moving west between Givet and Brussels ; that a slightly smaller mass of the enemy was at Thionville, while

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## Diagram of position & strength of opposing Armies 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1914



*N.B. The figures show approximate  
number of Divisions in Armies,  
omitting Cav'y Div<sup>ns</sup>.*

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south of Thionville the Germans were on the defensive. With this knowledge Joffre issued his orders for the coming battle.

Two of his armies were to penetrate the German centre through Luxemburg, while the British and Belgian Armies with the French 5th Army were to meet and hold in check the German outflanking force.

Between 17th and 21st August, the small British Army marched from its concentration area at Maubeuge up to its allotted position in the line of battle, to bear its part in General Joffre's plan. The II Corps was to be on the outward flank. The I Corps (under Haig), immediately on the left of the French, was to complete this forward march in two long stages, and on the third day the Corps was to wheel to its right and move forward to battle. The marches, though uneventful, were long and fatiguing. Each day in the small hours of the morning the troops marched off, and late in the afternoon reached their appointed billeting area.

A bird's-eye view of the whole battle-line on the 21st August showed the French centre attacking the Germans; the French right stable, but heavily engaged; and the French left flank, which was to meet and hold the German envelopment, stationary and inactive, still awaiting the arrival of the British force. On the German side the great mass of troops designed to deliver their decisive blow were moving round the north-west and north of the Allied line.

Early in the morning of 22nd August—the last day of the approach march—the news of the previous day's fighting reached the British Army. It was not heartening. The great French attack which was to have pierced the German centre had made little or no progress. It had been heavily counter-attacked in the course of the afternoon, and in places had been driven back. It was too early as yet to say that it had definitely failed, but it was certain that it had fallen far short of the anticipated success. By the evening of August 22nd it had become evident that the following day would no longer be a day of marching, but that the troops would be engaged in battle. On Sunday, August 23rd, the first day of battle for the British Army in the Great War,

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dawn broke through thin mist and drizzle. As the morning wore on the mist cleared and the rain ceased. There was little sign of war. Early church bells were summoning the inhabitants to Mass, and the peasants in their Sunday clothes could be seen moving along the roads, unconscious and unconcerned about the disaster impending on their country. The scene might well have been laid at those very army manœuvres in England, which had been cancelled only three short weeks before, and which, but for the outbreak of war, would have been taking place at that very moment. As at manœuvres, Haig was early in the saddle, spending the first hours of daylight moving among his units.

The troops were in good spirits, though some units did indeed show signs of the long weary marches up from their concentration area. Reservists were once more wearing their heavy army boots, after a long interval of civilian life, and the French cobbled streets formed an unaccustomed roadway for British feet.

The men had had little sleep, and officers now about to lead them into battle for the first time were not free from the nervous strain, generally more acute in anticipation than in actual battle.

From certain points of vantage Haig could discern in the far distance the movement of enemy troops ; and air reports, which were now beginning to arrive, indicated that the German outflanking movement was on a far wider scale and in much greater strength than either the French or British Commander-in-Chief had anticipated.

At 10.30 in the morning Haig was summoned to a conference with Sir John French. Already the peaceful scene had begun to change. A few miles to the northward shells were beginning to fall ; the stream of refugees, which was to be the constant companion of the Army during the long days of Retreat, had begun to flow ; far in the distance could be heard the sound of heavy guns, showing that the French Army was engaged in battle.

The conference at Headquarters brought no reassurance to Haig. The fears which he had entertained from the day of mobilization of the different personalities who controlled

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operations at General Headquarters appeared to be realized. There was a sharp division of opinion between the Intelligence and the Operations Sections of the General Staff. The Intelligence branch reported large movements of the enemy forces in and through Tournai. Both agents and air reports stated that all the roads were thickly covered by massed German troops moving westwards. These were to Haig's mind facts on which all subsequent decisions and views should be based, but Sir John French would not accept these Intelligence reports.

Sir Archibald Murray took little part in the discussion, nor did Sir John French appear either to consult or to attach much importance to the views of his own Chief of Staff. The association between Sir John French and General Henry Wilson, which had become so close during Sir John French's tenure of office on the General Staff in London, and which had been strengthened during the Ulster crisis, led him to rely on the opinions of Wilson, and Wilson could not free his mind from the optimistic view of the French General Staff. It was sufficient for Wilson that the French were about to attack. Success was ensured. The German centre would be broken.

"In war," as Haig had often emphasized in peace time, "we tend to believe what we wish for."

Accepting Wilson's view, Sir John French, in his summary of the situation to the conference, made no reference to the information supplied by his own Intelligence Department, but emphasized the facts which supported the view of the French General Staff.

It was the first of the many incidents of the war in which Haig and Wilson were to hold diametrically opposite views.

Haig returned to his Headquarters at Bonnet gravely concerned. The British Army was, in his opinion, in a very alarming situation. The fact that the morning and afternoon passed without important incident on the I Corps front increased rather than diminished his anxiety. If the Germans were designing a big out-flanking movement to envelop and crush the British Army, they would not attack the inner flank in force. At four o'clock a small attack did

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indeed develop—and one brigade was heavily shelled—but it was not an attack in strength. On the left of the British Army, however, a more serious engagement had begun, and late in the afternoon the Staff Officer of the II Corps came to Haig's Headquarters with a request for assistance. "The battle is won," said he, "if you only send a battalion or two." Haig, though he could not share this optimism, at once despatched three battalions to the danger-point.

At nightfall on 23rd August, optimism still reigned at General Headquarters, and orders were issued for the continuation of the advance of the British Army on the morrow; but by 2 a.m. on the morning of 24th information which could not be gainsaid, and could no longer be ignored, confirmed all that Haig had feared. The French attack had failed. The Germans were moving in great strength round the outer flank of the British Army; the French Army on the British right had already begun to withdraw; and the British Army—threatened with isolation—must retreat with all speed if it was to escape disaster.

Haig, awakened at 2 a.m. to face a complicated and highly critical change in the situation, was at his best. It was a situation that required careful judgment and prompt action. A highly trained and determined enemy was in close touch with his outpost line. His right flank was each minute being further exposed by the rapid withdrawal of the French. The orders which he had received from General Headquarters were to cover the retirement of the British II Corps on his left; but this was clearly impracticable. It involved a flank march in the very face of the enemy and could only result in disaster. There were only two hours left before dawn, and by dawn it was reasonably certain that the Germans would begin their attack. Within those two hours it behoved Haig to set his own troops in motion; to make arrangements to resist any attack by the Germans—thereby gaining time for the retreat of his main columns; and to adjust the order of retirement with the II Corps, substituting some practical solution for the impractical orders of General Headquarters. It was never Haig's custom to rely on consultations with his Staff Officers in a time of crisis. He took personal and

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immediate control. Within five minutes a Staff Officer was on his way to General Smith-Dorrien to co-ordinate the retreat. A rearguard of two battalions of infantry and two brigades of artillery was formed under General Horne, and given orders to retaliate against any enemy attack by a prompt counter-attack. Complete, accurate and detailed instructions were dictated by Haig himself to the Staff Officers of his divisions for the commencement of the Retreat, and within half an hour of the receipt of General Headquarters' orders he himself had left in his motor car for the Headquarters of his divisions and brigades. Here he personally supervised the vital preparations for the early stages of the Retreat.

The high level of training of the officers both senior and junior in the Corps, and the discipline of the men gave a ready response to the prompt orders of the Commander. By dawn Haig had the satisfaction of knowing that the whole of the Corps were in motion, and that the Retreat had begun without any hitch and in complete good order. A French Staff Officer, who visited the I Corps Headquarters in the early hours of the morning, reported to French General Headquarters that in the I Corps everything was going forward "like a peace march."

Though Haig had every reason to be satisfied with the situation of his own Corps he still doubted whether the Commander-in-Chief fully realized the seriousness of the wide outflanking movement of the Germans. He himself had a clear conception of what he now believed to be the immediate task of the British Army. It was the same problem which he had thrashed out in his Staff Tours in India. A retreating army could not afford to risk battle: its first duty was to disengage itself from the enemy, to take advantage of the opportunity which its shortening lines of communication afforded it to disengage itself, and then await a suitable chance for resuming the initiative. Above all, in the particular problem of 1914, it had to keep in touch with the French troops retreating on its inner flank.

On August 24th, Haig motored to General Headquarters to impress this conviction on Sir John French. He urged on

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the Commander-in-Chief that if the British Army halted for an unnecessary action there was the gravest risk of the whole British force being surrounded and overwhelmed. Above all he argued that the withdrawal into the fortress of Maubeuge (which General Headquarters was then meditating) would be disastrous. The problem as Haig saw it offered but one solution, and that was for the whole Allied Force, moving rapidly in retreat, to extricate itself from the threatened envelopment, and then resume the initiative in a concerted body. To be forced to fight under such conditions seemed to Haig an admission of failure, and he believed that the highly trained long service army which formed the Expeditionary Force should, under proper leadership, always be able to shake itself clear of the pursuing German Army, with no greater losses than those involved in a series of small rearguard actions. He returned to his Corps satisfied that Sir John French accepted and shared his views.

No period of the War—not even the anxious days of March, 1918—tried the endurance of the British Army more severely than the great Retreat from Mons. Day succeeded day in long—seemingly endless—marches, under the most trying conditions—now in semi-tropical heat, now in rain, with never a halt of more than a few hours. Each evening found the troops less able to face the next day's ordeal.

When the columns were permitted to halt—whether for a few minutes or for longer—the men threw themselves down by the roadside and were asleep almost before their bodies touched the ground.

Mounted men fell asleep in the saddle. Always there were the sounds of the guns rumbling in the far distance—sometimes in a continuous roar—when the armies on the right and left of the I Corps were attacked. Staff Officers moving along the lines of troops enforced a march discipline as strict as on an Aldershot Field Day.

For the I Corps it was a trial of endurance and of staff work rather than of fighting qualities: there were numerous but unimportant rearguard actions. The Corps was never seriously engaged.

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The administrative arrangements never failed. A plentiful supply of food was always ready at the appointed time and place: no man went hungry.

The Army had crossed to France with complete survey maps for an advance, but not for a retreat. Yet each evening the efforts of the Ordnance Survey in England and the careful staff work in France supplied a map of the march for the ensuing day.

Over everything in the I Corps was the controlling hand of its Commander. Each day's orders were written by him in his own handwriting, and these orders—clear and concise, with hardly a correction or emendation—in the firm, legible handwriting, and with the bold initials D. H. (which the whole Empire now knows so well) appended, will serve as a model for many future generations of British soldiers. In the later stages of the war when staffs were drawn from officers with less training, orders were given in greater detail, but in these early days every officer was an expert, and a few clear words sufficed to direct the movements.

Throughout the whole of the Retreat, Haig shared the hardships of the troops. He took no longer hours of rest than he could afford to allow the men. From dawn till nightfall he was in the saddle.

His Headquarters moved at the rear of the main columns in close touch with the rearguards, but each day he himself rode along the whole length of the line. His uniform was neat as in peace time; his face immobile; his horse fully groomed; and his presence gave confidence and strength to all who saw him.

Although none of the small rearguard actions developed into serious fighting, the threat of being brought to premature battle was always present. At Landrecies, on August 25th, it appeared for a time as though the I Corps was to experience the same fate as the II Corps at Le Cateau, and Haig himself was in imminent danger of capture by the enemy.

The Guards Brigade, which formed the rearguard for the day's march, had reached Landrecies at four o'clock in the afternoon. Everything seemed quiet, though refugees passing

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through reported that Uhlans were close at hand, and produced a helmet and lance in support of their statement.

Officers who patrolled the Forest of Mormal and the neighbourhood found no sign of the enemy and reported "All clear." The day's march had been exceptionally long and trying; the rearguard was close on the heels of the main body; a river offered a suitable defensive line, and orders were given for the Brigade to halt until the early hours of the following morning. Hardly had the troops settled in their resting-places when a sharp infantry attack supported by the fire of field artillery broke on the outskirts of the village. For a few hours the issue of the fighting hung in the balance.

Haig had taken up his own quarters for the night at Landrecies, and it was reported to him that the village was surrounded and the rearguard cut off from the main body. From early morning the intermittent sound of guns had shown him that the enemy were in close touch with the II Corps. It now seemed probable that the pursuing Germans had achieved their object, and that the whole British force had been overtaken and were to be brought to battle.

So serious did the position appear to Haig that he gave orders to his Staff to prepare to destroy all records which might be of value to the enemy.

An Engineer and Staff Officer were sent with troops to prepare the local barracks as a last defence, where Haig told his Staff he would make a final stand and sell his life as dearly as possible if retreat were cut off. "If we can't get away," said Haig, "we will fight to the last man."

Within a few hours the situation cleared: no strong German attack developed, and by evening fighting had died down. A few shells still fell into the town, and there was an occasional burst of machine-gun fire from the hastily improvised barricades, but though the village might still be surrounded by a thin German line, it became apparent that only a relatively small German force had succeeded in overtaking the I Corps. There was no weight behind the German attack. Haig, reassured of the temporary safety of the rearguard, determined to make an effort to rejoin the main body of his troops.

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At midnight the barricades, which had been hastily constructed, were removed from one of the roads, and a motor car with Haig and two Staff Officers\* passed out. Thin though the German cordon was round the whole area, there seemed small chance of escaping capture.

The only roads available were village tracks with many turnings; the night was misty, and neither headlights nor sidelights could be used. A Staff Officer memorized the map and directed the car, but no one had much hope that the venture would succeed.

At one point, indeed, the car was challenged, but no shot was fired, and by 1 a.m. Haig had rejoined the main body of his force and resumed command of the Corps.†

Early in the morning of the day succeeding the attack on Landrecies, the Guards Brigade were able to resume the retreat, leaving behind them only some hospitals and wounded men; but all mishaps were not yet at an end. One of the divisions mistaking its orders, marched five miles due east on the wrong road before the error was discovered; touch was lost with the II Corps on the west of Haig's Corps and was not resumed until three days later. The French Corps on the east spread over the roads which had been allotted to the British, and threatened to hold up the whole march. Although the matter was rapidly adjusted, the delay resulted in the rearguard being heavily attacked the following day by superior forces, and involved the consequent isolation and annihilation of the 2nd Munster Battalion—a disaster which marked the first serious reverse for the I Corps.

On one occasion during the Retreat, Haig's determination and prompt decision saved the situation.

On the 27th the whole column was suddenly halted: there were sounds of heavy firing ahead, and a report was brought back to Haig that the enemy was holding the position athwart the roads over which the Corps had to retreat. The

\* General John Gough and the Author.

† The incident at Landrecies was not the only occasion when Haig's personal safety had been seriously threatened. On the early morning of the first day of the Retreat, a Staff Officer directing his car mistook his road, and for a mile motored straight towards the enemy, only discovering the error in time to avert the disaster of Haig's capture.



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Divisional Commander informed Haig that the leading troops were being deployed to attack and drive them out. Meantime, the whole long column was halted, and away in the rear German shells were beginning to fall on the troops. The position was highly critical.

A delay of even a few hours in the march must inevitably give the Germans an opportunity to bring the whole Corps to battle.

Haig sent urgent orders forbidding deployment; the whole column was to continue its march, and force its way through any opposition which it might meet on the roads. His decision saved the Corps: the alarm proved unfounded, and the weary columns marched onwards.

On 1st September, the rearguard was again heavily engaged, and although the German attack was driven back, the strain on the retreating troops had almost reached breaking-point. There was great difficulty in getting some of them to resume the march. Haig personally ordered empty supply lorries back to the firing line to convey the more exhausted men.

By Friday, 4th September, the general situation showed signs of improvement. The Germans had abandoned their attempt at envelopment. The troops on their extreme right were moving inwards. The pursuit was at an end. To an inquiry from General Headquarters, Haig was able to report that, though tired, his troops were still capable of fighting: they would be better of a few days' rest, but even a single day's respite would, he believed, enable them to take their part in a great battle. On the following day came the reassuring news that the French armies were going to stand and attack.

With his usual Scottish caution, Haig made a careful investigation of the facts. A Staff Officer whom he sent to the French troops on his right to ascertain their intentions, and to investigate the condition of their troops, reported that the French Army appeared able and determined to attack. There had been a change in the Command: General Lanrezac had been succeeded by General D'Esperey as Commander of the French Army immediately on Haig's right: a soldier of great determination, with whom Haig

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was subsequently to have close dealings, and in whom he already had considerable confidence. Although impressed by the information supplied to him, Haig was not unduly optimistic. The situation was favourable, but there were, in his opinion, still two big "ifs,"—*if* the French advanced, and *if* their attack was not forestalled by a German blow.

That evening came the orders from General Headquarters that the Army was to advance eastwards with a view to attack. The thirteen days' Retreat, lasting from August 24th to September 5th, was over. During this period the I Corps had marched two hundred miles, suffered comparatively slight casualties, and, though physically exhausted, its fighting spirit was unimpaired. As Haig himself said with deep pleasure: "The moral of the Army has withstood this greatest trial of all warfare"—of retreat before a strong and efficiently led enemy. On the last day of the Retreat, indeed, the temper of the troops had showed signs of souring: staff officers had been greeted with glum looks, and there were murmurs as they moved down the line; but with their faces again turned towards the enemy, hope was reborn in the hearts of the men. Smiles took the place of frowns; the troops sang and whistled as they marched, and even foot-sore men sought to conceal their limp in their eagerness to share a place in the ranks, and take part in the attack which they believed to be the first step towards the successful termination of the war.

If Haig had every reason to be satisfied with the performance of his Corps, still more cause had the Corps to be satisfied with the behaviour of its Commander. He had stood the test of war. No one had seen him flurried or for a moment disturbed. Wherever the strain was greatest the troops knew that the Commander was close at hand. He had shown his power of accepting and bearing responsibility. He possessed the gift (apparently common to all great soldiers of all times) of sleeping undisturbed by any crisis. He would be roused from sleep to deal with an emergency situation, and could grasp the position, issue the requisite orders, and be asleep again almost before the officer receiving his instructions had had time to leave the room. He had never allowed discipline to relax, yet he had shown sympathy with

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all in the hardships which they had had to endure. The Reservists, serving under Haig for the first time in the Retreat, had learned to feel the same confidence in his leadership as the troops who had been trained by and served with him at Aldershot.

The I Corps indeed emerged from the Retreat, not only with moral unimpaired, but as an immensely more efficient fighting machine; for the whole Corps—Regulars and Reservists, old Commanders and new Commanders—formed a homogeneous entity, with complete trust in their Commander, and inspired by his fighting spirit.

## CHAPTER IX

### 1914—BATTLES OF THE MARNE, AISNE AND YPRES

THE tide of war which had flowed so swiftly and strongly towards the heart of France had now ceased to run ; the ebb, which after four years was to bring the British troops back on Armistice Day to the same battlefield of Mons, was about to begin.

On Sunday morning, 6th September, the I Corps found itself facing north-east awaiting the orders to advance and attack the Germans. Its position was now five miles south-west of the II Corps on its left, and in line with the French troops on its right. Patrols were pushed out to make contact with the enemy, but they moved sluggishly, drawing from Haig the comment that the strain of the Retreat had left its mark on the action of some of the Brigade Commanders. He spent the day infusing them with some of his own energy and fighting spirit. Nor was the action and position of the cavalry reassuring ; its energy seemed to have departed, and on this first day of the offensive it was actually bivouacked in the rear of the infantry.

The Corps had been warned that the advance would begin on 6th September, but by sunrise no order had been received. Haig appreciated the value of time, and moved his troops in anticipation of the orders.\* Though there was little fighting, progress was slow. Even a highly trained army does not easily adapt itself to the transition from retreat to advance ; it is apt to be over-cautious. The cavalry

\* The official orders, when they did arrive, were to "advance with a view to attack," but at noon these were supplemented by instructions to advance 14 miles.

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division, which alone could clear up the situation, was still far in the rear. Even in his own Corps Haig noticed that Commanders who had previously been the strongest advocates of bold action now tended to hold back.

By every means in his power, Haig sought to correct this tendency. Peremptory written orders were issued for energetic action. And by repeated personal visits to the headquarters of subordinate formations, Haig inspired his corps anew with both the spirit and method of offensive warfare. There was no lack of keenness on the part of the men. Every instinct prompted them to close with the enemy, and there was now the additional incentive that the troops saw with their own eyes the real meaning and significance of invasion by a hostile army. The Germans in their retreat had destroyed property wantonly, and the troops were eager to exact retribution.

Even Haig himself, though not easily disturbed, was incensed when he found that the room where he had his sleeping quarters had been occupied only a few nights previously by a German General and his Staff, one of whom had left his mark by putting his foot through the glass in the wardrobe.

On September 7th the I Corps crossed the Grand Morin with no opposition, but early on the following day there was the first noteworthy engagement in the pursuit up to the Marne. The I Corps reached the Petit Morin river and the advanced troops came into action against the German rearguard. There was a sharp action, and Haig, who had gone forward to infuse his own energy and resolution into the men, had the pleasure of seeing German troops—artillery as well as infantry—retiring in considerable disorder in the face of the British onslaught. Haig was well satisfied with the day's work. A sharp counter-attack of the enemy had been driven back, and if too much caution had been displayed, he knew that experience would correct that fault. All seemed to augur well for the future operations.

On this day, for the first time in the war, Haig himself came under close machine-gun fire. He had gone forward to some high ground, where a church stood, to watch the

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progress of the attack. A concealed detachment of Germans opened fire on Haig and his Staff, who had to take cover behind the tombstones in the churchyard.

The I Corps reached and crossed the Marne, after a series of short but sharp encounters with hostile rearguards, but the German retirement was now showing increasing signs of disorder. The road was littered with abandoned equipment. Haig hoped to be able to push through to Soissons, but orders from General Headquarters directed him to wheel to the right.

On 12th September the I Corps reached the Aisne, and secured the crossings at Pont d'Arcy and Bourg. Between 6th and 12th September the Corps had covered a distance of seventy miles, had fought two important engagements and captured over one thousand prisoners, and Haig with deep satisfaction remarked: "Such a feat following upon a prolonged and exhausting retreat shows that the short-service regular army of to-day can bear comparison with the long-service army of former years."

Although the resistance of the Germans was stiffening, he had high hopes that the enemy would find it impossible to reconstitute a strong defensive line until they had been driven out of the invaded territory.

On 12th September information at the disposal of General Headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force indicated that the First German Army, immediately in front of the British, was in full retreat towards the north and east, and that a gap still existed between the two portions of the German forces. General Joffre's instructions to the whole of the Allied Force included directions for the British Army to cross the Aisne, moving in a northerly direction in close touch with the French Army on their right, while yet another French Army operating on the extreme left of the Allied line was to seek to envelop the German flank.

In accordance with these orders, Haig had directed the I Corps to continue its advance on 13th September up to the River Aisne, with its divisions well closed up and ready to act according to the developments of the situation, and with patrols pushed across the river. Haig felt reasonably certain

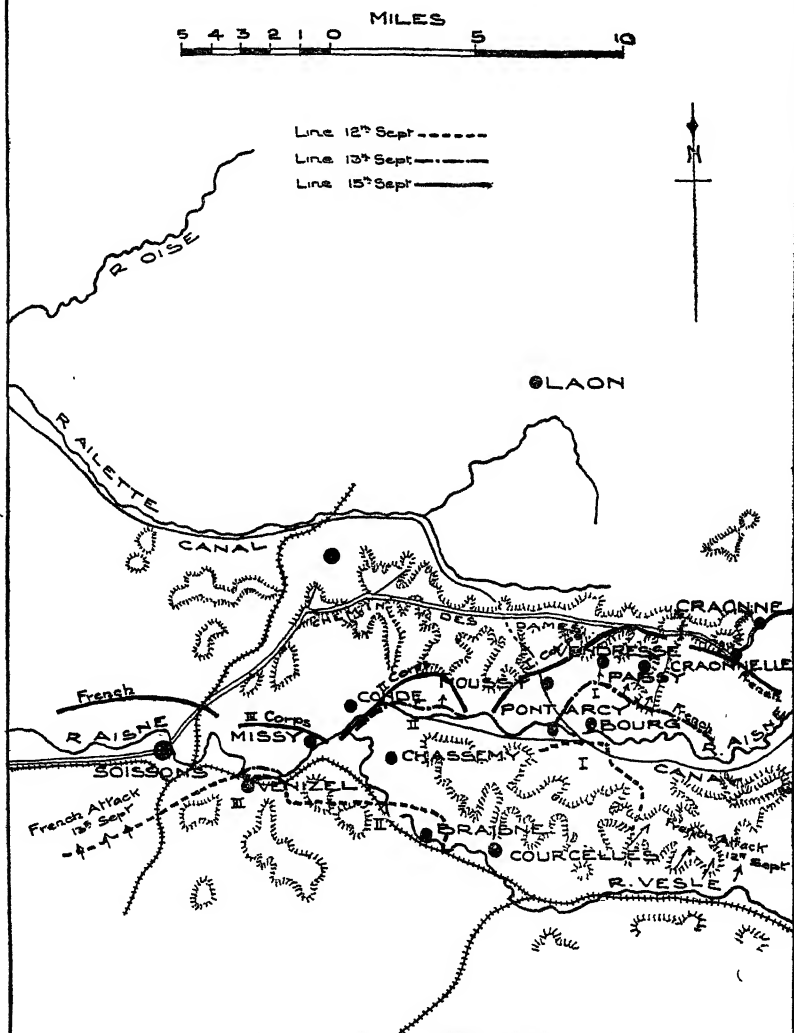
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that the Germans would be encountered in a strong rearguard position, and the fighting which developed in the early hours of the morning justified his anticipations; but behind this rearguard there still appeared to be a gap in the German main line, which might well be penetrated. By noon of 13th the I Corps had forced the crossings of the Aisne, and it seemed possible that the opposing force only consisted of a strong body of cavalry with artillery support.

The ground over which the I Corps was now operating can be described in general terms as a series of ridges stretching out like the fingers of the hand from the Chemin-des-Dames down to the river. It was a difficult but not impossible battle-ground. The situation from the Allied point of view demanded energetic action. If the Chemin-des-Dames could be seized, important results might follow.

On 13th September bridges were thrown over the river, and the whole Corps, after a hard fight, was in a position to attack in strength on the following day, with every hope, in the light of available information, of reaching the high ground of the Chemin-des-Dames. These hopes were doomed to disappointment. It was no longer a rearguard that faced the I Corps, but an army of fresh troops, which was now seeking to resume the offensive and drive the British back into the Aisne. Attack alternated with counter-attack. The weather was foggy and the fighting confused and at close quarters, but the I Corps was persistent, and by the early hours of the afternoon had fought its way forward and secured a foothold for a few hundred yards on the crest of the ridge. It had made appreciable headway; it had repulsed a series of counter-attacks, with heavy losses to the enemy, and late in the afternoon Germans could be seen retiring in some disorder. But the forces on the left and right of the I Corps had not met with equal success. On the left the Second British Corps had made very slight progress, and on the right of the I Corps the French XVIII Corps had suffered severely, and had been driven back. The I Corps was far in front of the general line of the Allies, but in its own immediate vicinity the whole German defensive line might crumble if but a few hundred yards more ground could

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be gained. An army which had been retiring in such haste as had the German could not readily recover its high moral, and it appeared to Haig as if one of those fleeting opportunities which decide the fate of battles was offered.

At 4.30, therefore, Haig called on his Corps for yet another effort, and ordered a general attack. The troops responded nobly to the call of their Commander. One brigade, advancing over heaps of German bodies, reached the main road on the crest of the ridge; but it could do no more, and night fell on the Corps—exhausted but victorious—holding the front line trenches of the German position. It was an isolated success on the Allied front, and achieved at a cost of heavy casualties; but if it fell short of full achievement, it accomplished much. It is now known from German sources that the determined action of the I Corps—and in particular the attack which Haig had ordered late in the afternoon—had forestalled a German offensive designed to drive back the whole allied force to the south bank of the Aisne.

The German retreat had ended. The following day marked the beginning of that slow process of trench warfare, which was to be the predominant feature of the fighting for the remainder of the war.

The hostile resistance had stiffened perceptibly. The I Corps in its advance had outpaced both the II Corps on its left and the French on its right. The enemy was definitely located in a strong position which would require an attack in strength. The II Corps came up on the left of the I Corps, but although the orders from General Headquarters were to continue the pursuit to the line Laon-Fresnes, the intensity of the fighting soon showed that the Germans had occupied a position of considerable strength, and that a battle of some importance was imminent. Strong counter-attacks developed late in the evening of 14th, but were driven off, though the effects of the severe handling which the II Corps had sustained at Mons and Le Cateau were beginning to tell. While the I Corps was able to advance and hold the ground which it seized, the II Corps did not meet with equal success, and Haig commented: "This is the result of the unfortunate

decision to stand and fight at Le Cateau.”\* The whole of the reserve strength of the I Corps was engaged; the French on the British right were not able to make progress, and all hopes of a rapid advance to the position had to be abandoned.

Not only was the German position naturally strong, but the German superiority in artillery (which influenced the whole trend of the fighting during 1914-1915) now became evident. There was a continuous rain of well directed and effective high-explosives upon the British trenches, and the British had little high-explosive armament with which to retaliate, and that little was not giving good results. With a view to improving the artillery fire, Haig ordered experiments to be carried out with an aeroplane to direct the fire—the first step in what subsequently proved to be one of the most useful tactical developments of the war.

Though the I Corps was still trying to assume the offensive, and was meeting with some success, it was an isolated effort. On neither flank did it receive effective co-operation and support. For a week longer the I Corps endured the strain of these repeated efforts to advance, but the troops were feeling the effects of the incessant fighting, and Haig urged Sir John French to institute measures for their relief. There were no reserves; men were continuously in the firing line with only a short interval for meals; the weather had been wet and cold; and the fact that a hot meal could rarely be served increased their discomfort. Yet in spite of wet, hunger and fatigue, Haig noted that the troops were in excellent spirits, and that the men to whom he spoke made light of their hardships. One of the Brigade Commanders (who was later to take a very prominent part in the war), on learning from Haig that arrangements for the relief of his brigade were in progress, replied: “We never complained or asked for relief; and you know, I hope, that we would have held on to the bitter end.”

On September 23rd, Sir John French called Haig to a

\* Although Haig always maintained this opinion, it is important to remember that the “Official History,” with access to all sources of information, arrives at the conclusion that if Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien had not decided to let his troops fight as a corps at Le Cateau, he would have had to sacrifice at least one of his divisions.

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consultation as to the possibilities of a further advance. The I Corps still held a pronounced salient from the general line. Its artillery had, in the meantime, been reinforced by the arrival of some heavy howitzers, which had been mounted on barges on the Aisne-Oise Canal, and from that position afforded increased support to the infantry, but even with this additional strength Haig considered that any further advance was impossible until the French troops on his right should come up level with him. When that had been done, he considered that a general attack on a broad front might have every hope of success.

In spite of repeated and gallant efforts, the French troops were not able to advance far enough to justify the general attack which they desired, and the battle died down with the armies located in the positions they had reached on 14th September.

The Battle of the Aisne was insignificant in comparison with the great battles of the later years of the war, yet it was a remarkable military achievement. A river passage had been forced by direct attack; a small force of highly trained troops driven vigorously forward had penetrated deep into the enemy line, and had held the ground that they had gained. The British Army, although suffering heavy casualties, had learnt much that was of great value in the later stages of the war. The lethargy which had marked the beginning of the operations after the great Retreat had entirely disappeared. The troops had regained confidence in their own rifle fire; they had learnt the value of entrenchments, and they had discovered how to construct them quickly. The young soldiers and the reservists had been absorbed into the formations easily and rapidly. The troops had shown that the national characteristics which had achieved success in the wars of the past were unimpaired. There was the same dogged endurance under heavy fire; there was the same willingness to take advantage of any fleeting opportunity; the same power of determined fighting even in the most adverse circumstances; the same refusal to recognize such a thing as defeat.

In the I Corps the confidence of the troops in their Commander had been confirmed and increased. Haig's initiative

in seizing the opportunity offered by a partially destroyed aqueduct for the transference of his guns to the north bank of the Aisne had enabled the I Corps—alone of the whole Army—to make progress. He had infused his own energy into the general attack ordered late in the afternoon of the first day's battle: he had shown his care for his men in his personal supervision of their rationing arrangements and ultimately in measures for their relief from the trenches. The units had again become accustomed to see him close up to the firing line, when occasion demanded his presence, sharing the common danger. He had instituted the new system of observation of artillery fire by aeroplane. He had welded the units into a most formidable fighting machine. The I Corps had achieved an *esprit de corps* which was to stand it in good stead in the further trials which lay ahead of it.

Haig had himself learnt much that was to be of service to him in the later years of the war. He had come to France after a full study and with a complete knowledge of all the theories of the art of war. He had had experience of warfare as it was known to the British Army in all the small wars during the period of his service; but even the South African War had offered little opportunity for the manipulation of large forces against a highly trained army. At best it had been little more than guerrilla warfare. Manœuvres, however realistic, cannot supply a full knowledge of what men can accomplish in danger; how much they can endure of hardships and privations, and where the limit of their endurance can be placed. To his theoretical knowledge, Haig had now added practical experience. He had tested the efficiency of the units that he had trained, and the utility of the tenets that he had taught. He had realized—as nothing but war can make a commander realize—how fleeting are the opportunities that afford decisive success. He had learnt to rely more on his Staff.

He had come to France with little confidence in the British Commander-in-Chief, and without a great belief in the fighting efficiency of the French. Both these judgments he had now modified.

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Though still doubtful of Sir John French's knowledge of scientific war, he had formed a higher opinion of his determination, sound sense and tactical judgment ; and although he still lacked confidence in the French staffs, he had acquired a considerable respect for the fighting qualities of their troops, when efficiently led.

He had not as yet had close personal dealings with General Joffre, but he already appreciated the ability and judgment of the French Commander-in-Chief, and retained his belief in him throughout the whole period of Joffre's command of the French Army.

From the relative strengths of the British and French Armies at the time it was essential that the strategical leadership should come from French General Headquarters ; and Haig was confident that in Joffre the Allied Armies had a leader of imperturbable calm, tenacity and determination, and with a strategical judgment that could be relied on to meet the varying circumstances of the war.

Even while he recognized the competence of the Allied Command he did not always find himself in full accord with its decisions ; in particular he criticized the change of direction imposed on the British Expeditionary Force on 11th September.

He had himself urged on Sir John French that the British Army should press straight forward to Soissons, and had been overruled. As fuller details and knowledge of the German dispositions became available there appeared little doubt but that had his advice been accepted the Aisne position would have been turned, and the German retreat must have been continued far to the eastward, and might even have resulted in the German evacuation of French territory.

In the course of the battle he had been disappointed by the failure of the corps on his right and left flanks to make headway. He attributed this lack of success of the II Corps to the severe handling which it had received at the battle of Le Cateau, from which recovery was necessarily slow.

Had the II Corps been as fresh as the I Corps for that battle, Haig argued that the advance to the Chemin-des-

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Dames would have been on a broad front instead of on a narrow one, and the Germans would not have had the opportunity of strengthening their line on the Aisne and thus checking the Allied advance.

At one stage in the battle he thought he had discovered one reason for the lack of energy of the French Corps on his right in inadequate rations, and had forthwith ordered the issue to them of ten thousand rations of tinned beef. "The poor wretches," he said, "are in cotton uniform, and have had nothing to eat but wet bread and raw meat for a week. Good food will improve their fighting efficiency."

The Aisne Battle had confirmed Haig in his conception of the eventual determining factor of the war. At the Council of War on August 5th he had pointed out that since both Great Britain and Germany were fighting for their existence the war would inevitably be a prolonged struggle, and would require the development of the full force of the British Empire to achieve success. The Battle of the Aisne, which had enabled him to gauge the fighting qualities of the German troops, confirmed his belief that man-power would ultimately decide the war, and he directed his Staff to begin the study of the man-power which the German nation could effectively employ in the field. The Staff which was with Haig on the Aisne became widely scattered as the war progressed, but some members remained with him until the end, and the studies of the man-power of the German Army—commenced during these early months at First Corps Headquarters—were developed at each successive stage of Haig's progress in the war, and he rarely allowed more than a day or two to pass without himself inquiring into the developments of this investigation. It was perhaps this insistence on the importance of man-power as the final and determining factor in the war which led many critics to consider that his only test of success was the relative size of the "butcher's bill" at the end of each action. No estimate of his view of war could be more incorrect. Nobody realized better than Haig that the fighting power of an army and of a people depends on their moral. Certainly no commander placed a higher value on the power

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of well-directed manœuvres to lower the moral of the enemy, even though the balance sheet of the casualty list might not show a pronounced advantage to the Allies. There was little to choose in the early months of the war between the moral of the Germans and the British. There was no likelihood of either the German army or the German nation collapsing in the face of an untoward strategic situation, so long as her armies occupied foreign territory and she had ample means of filling the gaps in her ranks.

Immediately after the stabilization of the line of battle on the Aisne, both the Allies and the Germans sought by a series of outflanking movements to envelop their enemies. There ensued a succession of overlapping manœuvres—each ending in an indeterminate battle, which ultimately brought the battle line to the coast. As the line reached out northwards, Sir John French had represented to General Joffre the desirability of the British troops resuming their original position on the left of the line. There were obvious advantages in this plan; the British communications would be shorter and less complicated, and the whole of the British armed forces would come once more under a single command; naval assistance, which might on occasion be required, would be more readily available if rendered to armies of the same nation. On the other hand there was the disadvantage that to withdraw troops from the fighting line and move them to the extreme flank would impede other operations; but Joffre acceded to French's representations, and the British troops were gradually withdrawn during the first fortnight of October and despatched to the Ypres area. The last troops to move were those of the I Corps; but on 16th October they set out, and Haig, travelling by car, reached St. Omer, where French had his Headquarters, late in the afternoon.

The position in the Northern area on Haig's arrival was not unlike that which had preceded the arrival of the British troops on the banks of the Aisne. The II Corps, the III Corps and the Cavalry Corps, which had preceded the I Corps, had already been engaged with some success. The fighting had left the position generally promising; there

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appeared to be signs of a German retirement towards the line Douai-Lille. Although there were reports that new formations, composed of old men and recruits from Germany, were de-training near Brussels, there did not appear to be any large concentration of German troops in progress. With the advent of the I Corps on the 19th, ready for battle, there seemed every reason to hope that a considerable advance would be possible.

At this time there were opposing the Germans in Flanders troops of three different nationalities—Belgians, British, and French. General Foch was in command of the French armies in the area, but there was no technical unity of command. The Belgian and British armies were acting—in theory at least—independently of the French, but in practice complete unity of plan was attained by the loyal co-operation of the three Commanders.

The general plan was to advance to break the enemy's front, and then by wheeling south-east to attack the main German forces on the flank and seize their communications. The German plan was not dissimilar: their intention was to pierce the allied line at Roye (near Amiens) and simultaneously to envelop the allied northern flank, and thus annihilate all the allied troops between these two points. The first stage of the great Battle of Ypres was therefore an encounter battle between the armies, each advancing to attack the other. It was only much later, when the Germans had developed a greatly superior force, that the Allies were thrown definitely on the defensive. All hope of an advance was then surrendered, and every effort was concentrated upon resisting the German blow.

The I Corps came into the battle line to the north of Ypres on October 20th. Late in the evening of the 19th Sir John French gave long instructions to Haig, telling him that the hostile strength on the front between Menin and Ostend did not exceed one corps. The I Corps, in the Commander-in-Chief's opinion, need not expect much opposition. They were to attack via Thourout, with the object of capturing Bruges. It was left to Haig to decide whether, after passing through Ypres, he should turn northwards and attack the



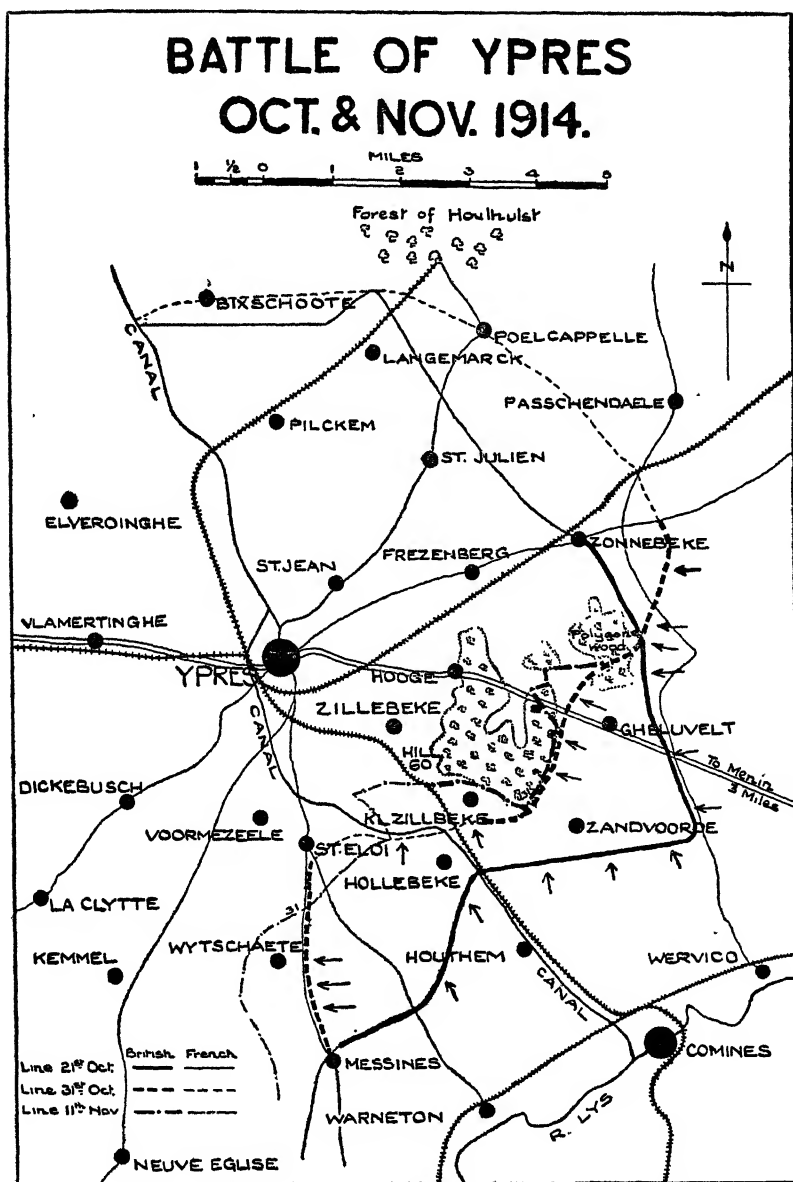
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enemy in that direction, or move towards Courtrai, six miles north-east of Menin.

On 20th October, the two divisions of the I Corps moved up into the battle line, and on the following day advanced to the attack. Although Haig was told that little more than rearguard fighting was expected, he was doubtful of the validity of the information, and moved with extreme caution. The advance was to be methodical, in short, well-defined steps, and the ground gained at each step was to be entrenched before a further move forward was attempted. It was fortunate that he took these precautions. The attack from which so much had been expected had been ordered twenty-four hours too late, and by that time the German reserves, which had been reported at Brussels on the 18th, had reached the front line, and were themselves attacking. It was an encounter battle—both armies moving forward to attack, both expecting to find their enemy on the defensive, and both ignorant of or underestimating their opponents' strength. By three o'clock in the afternoon of the 20th it was clear that there was a deadlock, and Haig issued orders that all further attempts at advance were to cease and that the troops were to halt and entrench the positions which they had reached.

Once more the I Corps was in a prominent salient from the general line in which seven and a half British divisions with five Allied cavalry divisions were engaged in battle on a front of some thirty-five miles, against eleven German divisions and eleven cavalry divisions.

For a week the battle raged with varying results on the Allied Front. Although the orders for the Allies were for a continuation of the attack, and although French and British General Headquarters became from day to day more optimistic, and German attacks were beaten off with heavy casualties, yet the British troops were suffering severely. The I Corps, its numbers reduced and its front contracted, still held its place in the salient in the line and received no respite. The units daily became smaller and smaller; trained officers fewer and fewer, with none to take their places. Even more serious than the loss of men were deficiencies in artillery and ammunition; there were only one hundred and



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fifty rounds per gun in the theatre of war, and only seven rounds per gun were arriving from home. Nor was there any sign that the German pressure would relax.

Throughout the whole period of the Battles of the Aisne and of Ypres, the Allies obtained complete information of the German intentions by means of messages of a German cavalry commander, who obligingly transmitted his orders by wireless in clear. From this source, it now became known to the Allies that the Germans were concentrating great forces for a final attempt to break through the Allied line. Although the accuracy of the information could not be denied, the French High Command was not yet prepared to abandon all hope of achieving success by a vigorous attack in the Ypres area, and the orders which the I Corps received, up to the very eve of the culmination of this stage of the great battle in the German attack of October 29th, were for an Allied advance.

On the evening of the 28th Haig, while under orders from General Headquarters to attack the Germans on the following day, had received warning from reliable sources that his Corps was itself to be the object of attack by at least one German corps—and probably more—to the south of the Menin Road.

To meet this situation Haig directed that one division of his force should press forward to attack to the north of the Menin Road, while the remainder of his small force held back the German attack on the south of the Road.

From available statistics we now possess accurate information of the relative strengths. Opposing the Allied Forces of six and a half divisions there were no fewer than fifteen and a half German divisions, while the strength in cavalry was also in favour of the German Army. More important still, the Germans were able to mass two hundred and fifty heavy guns against the twenty-six heavy guns, which was the total number that the British could muster.

At nightfall, therefore, on the 28th the small British army was about to attack an immensely superior German force, which was itself awaiting morning to attack and overwhelm the British.

In the early morning of the 29th the German attack

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broke on the I Corps front—not as had been anticipated south of the Menin Road, but along it and to the north of it. By eleven o'clock in the forenoon Haig received information that the German attack had achieved considerable success, the 7th Division line having been broken on a frontage of several hundred yards. He threw in his Corps reserves to restore the situation on his right, while at the same time he ordered his own attack on the left to be suspended, and troops to be sent back to reconstitute his reserves.

Late in the afternoon the counter-attack on the right had recaptured almost all the ground which had been lost ; but the 29th—the first day of the crisis—had not been satisfactory either for the I Corps or for the British Army as a whole. Casualties had been very heavy, and they had brought no compensating success. Haig's reserves had been materially reduced ; formations were now mixed and, most vital of all, the small portion of the line which the Germans had succeeded in holding enabled them to conceal their further preparations from the British.

Yet at nightfall both Foch, who was commanding the French troops in the northern area, and Sir John French thought that the situation was not unfavourable, and issued orders for a further offensive on the morrow. Haig could not share their optimism. His troops had borne the heat and burden of the day, and information he received led him to believe that the Germans were in greater strength than was appreciated at General Headquarters. He therefore ordered his three divisions to entrench the position which they held. Units were to be organized ; active reconnaissance was to be carried out during the night and early morning to ascertain the strength of the enemy ; and orders for the resumption of an offensive movement were only to be issued when the position cleared up as the day advanced.

There was no rest for the men of the I Corps during the night. Defences were hastily improved, all the available strands of barbed wire were put up, and staff officers and regimental officers did what they could to reorganize and reconstruct the formations. This time was not wasted : it was due solely to the work done on the night of October

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29th-30th that the I Corps was able to withstand the full force of the German blow which broke on it on 30th October.

Although Haig realized on the night of the 29th that the 30th would be a critical day, yet he had not full information of the strength of the attack which the I Corps would have to endure. He was aware that two complete German corps, and an additional reserve division (27th Reserve Corps, 15th Corps and the 6th Bavarian Reserve division) were in front of him, together with the IV Cavalry Corps, but he did not know that the Germans had moved up an additional five divisions.

It was only by midday on 30th October from a captured German order that Haig fully grasped the importance which the German General Headquarters was attaching to these operations. The order ran :

“The break-through will be of decisive importance. We must and will conquer; settle for ever with the centuries-long struggle, end the war, and strike the decisive blow against our most detested enemy. We will finish with the British, Indians, Canadians, Moroccans and other trash, feeble adversaries, who surrender in great numbers if they are attacked with vigour.”

At daybreak on the morning of the 30th a bombardment commenced all along the British front. The morning was dull and misty; nothing could be seen of the enemy trenches, and information came back slowly to Corps Headquarters. From the left and from the centre news was not disquieting. Although infantry attacks in varying strength developed from 9 a.m., and lasted until nearly noon, the line still held; but on the right the full weight of the German attack broke. From 6.30 until 8 a.m. the concentrated fire of two hundred and fifty German heavy guns fell on the line held by the dismounted cavalry units on the I Corps' right. The British artillery could make little reply, and at 8.30 Haig received information that the cavalry on his right had been driven back, and that his right flank was in great danger. He sent what help he could—two battalions under his veteran brigade commander, General Bulfin, to retrieve the situation, but the counter-attack failed, and during the early hours of the afternoon Haig

had to face the fact that the Germans had penetrated within three miles of Ypres, and that there were no reserves to interpose between them and the town. If the town fell, the communications not only of his own Corps, but of the French Corps on his left, would be destroyed. He had no further troops to send. A message to General Dubois, who commanded the French Corps on his left, met with a ready response. General Dubois despatched a detachment of French infantry to fill the gap, and they came into action on the following day.

Though the Germans made no attempt to exploit their success, the position at nightfall did not give rise to high hopes. The troops had been fighting continuously for ten days; their reserves were exhausted; no reinforcements either in men or guns were coming from home; and although the German attack had been stayed it was obviously only a respite. The Germans were in great numerical and material superiority, and a renewal of the attack on the following day was inevitable. Yet there were bright spots. The co-operation between French and British had been cordial and complete. General Dubois's prompt response to Haig's appeal for help, which had greatly relieved Haig's anxiety, was not a solitary instance. The three French Generals with whom Haig came most in contact during those anxious days—Foch, D'Urbal and Dubois—never failed to lend every assistance. They realized that Haig would not apply for aid unless extreme necessity forced his hand. Further, the Germans were showing far less determination in their attacks than in the early days of the battle. The effect of the British infantry fire was evident, and although the British casualties had been high it was obvious that the Germans had suffered even more heavily. Above all, so far as the intangible but decisive factor of moral could be weighed in the balance, the advantage appeared to rest on the side of the exhausted but indomitable British troops.

None knew better than Haig that the next day's fighting, if the British line did not hold, might decide the issue of the land war. In the evening he drove back to Ypres to see that all was being done for the supplies of the troops and the relief of the wounded, but at night he returned to his advanced

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headquarters close behind the fighting line. There was little rest for the Staff, but Haig had done all that he could. He retired to bed, and slept as soundly as if the world had been at peace, until the sound of guns woke him at daybreak.

The day was warm and fine ; there was a morning mist, but it was not as dense as on the previous day, and it lifted entirely as the morning wore on. At 6 a.m. the concentrated fire of the massed German artillery fell on the British line, and was followed by an infantry attack. To the Germans it may well have appeared that there was not much fear of failure. The British troops whom they met were haggard and unshaven, plastered in mud and clothed in rags, with all the outward appearance of an exhausted army, and into the fight the Germans were able to pour a new and fresh force. The first hours of the day must have fulfilled every German expectation. The full weight of the attack was directed on Gheluvelt, and at 11.30 the town fell. A counter-attack directed to recapture it failed. News of this failure reached Haig shortly after noon, and a few minutes later a Staff Officer whom he had sent forward early in the day to the I Division brought back the information that the line was broken, and that some part of the Division was falling back rapidly and in disorder. Although, as is so frequently the case in war, the news which reached the Commander was contradictory, yet even from the conflicting reports of stragglers who were already drifting back to Headquarters one fact clearly emerged. There had arisen the most critical and dangerous situation which the British Expeditionary Force had been called upon to face.

Staff officers were at once sent to inform Generals Foch and Dubois of the dangerous position of the Corps, and Haig moved the cavalry brigade, his last reserves, to the support of the I Division. He traced across his map a line a little more than a mile from the walls of Ypres, to which the Corps should retire if it were driven back, "and there," he said, "it must fight to the end." Then, with his personal staff and escort, he rode slowly up the Menin Road, through the stragglers, back into the shelled area, his face immobile and inscrutable—saying no word, yet by his presence and

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his calm restoring hope to the disheartened and strength to the exhausted troops.

In an hour's time he was back at his Headquarters to find still worse news awaiting him. A strong infantry attack had developed against his right, and was reported to be making progress. Lomax and Monro,\* who, in command of the two Aldershot Divisions, had shared all the vicissitudes of the war, and in whom Haig had absolute confidence, met to confer in a château a few hundred yards further up the Menin Road, and there had been overwhelmed by a sudden burst of artillery fire. Both commanders had been struck down: the former mortally wounded, the latter stunned by a wound in his forehead. Five staff officers had been killed outright. The whole chain of command between the General Officer Commanding and the troops seemed irretrievably destroyed.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon Sir John French came to Haig's Headquarters, having had to force his way on the latter stages of the journey through a host of stragglers and a mass of transport moving rearwards towards Ypres. The position was at its worst: even the grooms and servants had been pushed forward into the front line to support the hard-pressed division. Haig could only describe the situation to Sir John French, and tell him of his own intention of going forward to take personal command of the I Division until General Bulfin should be able to take charge. Sir John French had no help to offer; all the British reinforcements were engaged; there was no telegraphic or telephonic communication with French Headquarters. The two Commanders parted—French to seek assistance from his allies, and Haig to ride once again up to the front line to do what he could to avert disaster.

Then, just when all seemed lost, there occurred one of those dramatic incidents which punctuated the periods of warfare. The Chief Engineer (General Rice), whom Haig had sent forward to keep in close touch with the position at the front, came galloping back to Haig with the news that the veteran Division had rallied, that General Fitzclarence's counter-attack had retaken Gheluvelt, and that the line was

\* General Sir Charles Monro, G.C.M.G., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.



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re-established. Haig's expression hardly changed. His Staff, who had so often seen him receive bad news with no alteration in his demeanour, now found him equally immune from any outward sign of relief. His action, however, was prompt. An A.D.C. was sent hot-foot with the news to overtake Sir John French, and Haig himself went forward to supervise the reorganization of stragglers and to ensure that the advantage was maintained.

Although the crisis was temporarily passed, the situation was still exceedingly grave. An hour of daylight remained which might be utilized by the Germans for a renewal of their attacks. The whole of the I Corps was utterly worn out : formations were intermixed ; divisional staffs were still disorganized by the loss of so many of their senior officers, and there were no reserves.

Haig might anticipate, but he could not know what would be the result of Sir John French's conference with General Foch, on which depended the fate of the fight on the succeeding day. His knowledge of Foch's character led him to assume that the French general would order an attack by the Allied troops which had not been engaged on the 31st. In spite of the exhaustion of his troops Haig was determined to co-operate, and accordingly at 7 o'clock he issued instructions to his divisions and to the cavalry division (which now served under him) to entrench the position which they held, and to be prepared to join in any offensive which the French might make on the next day. It is a striking example of Haig's firm hold on the principles of war, from which he never allowed his mind to be diverted either by failure or success. History does not afford many examples of a leader, who, on emerging from a crisis which had threatened to overwhelm his force, with his units still disorganized, his chief officers struck down, and his men exhausted and shattered by incessant fighting, could yet decide that another effort was required, and could order a fresh attack. Haig's forecast of Foch's action was justified, for the attack which he had anticipated opened on the following day, but, as had so often happened in the past, it was forestalled by a German onslaught, and little assistance was given to the weary I Corps.

No armies could continue fighting at the intensity which had characterized the attack of 31st October, and there was a few days' lull. On November 2nd indeed there was some fierce but localized fighting. For a short time the British troops gave ground for a few hundred yards near Gheluvelt, but by evening the line was restored, and the I Corps—sadly reduced in numbers and exhausted by their efforts—still faced their adversaries.

There followed three days of comparative quiet. Haig took advantage of this respite to strengthen his position. His Chief Engineer reminded him of a tactical device which had proved effective in South Africa, and Haig gave it immediate effect. Small strong points were constructed immediately behind the lines to act as rallying points in case another German attack succeeded in breaking through the front line, and it was to these precautions as much as to any other measures that the I Corps owed its success when the great and final crisis of the battle came on November 11th.

Meantime on the right of the battle area, but outside Haig's control, the result of the fighting was less favourable for the Allies. Some French troops had been interposed between the Corps of the British Expeditionary Force, and these had given way before the German attack. On November 6th the German line had been pressed forward to a point within two miles of Ypres. Haig's anxiety was again intense: the whole of his communications and the communications of the French Corps on his left passed through Ypres. If the town were to fall there existed a real risk of these units being cut off and overwhelmed with disaster.

A Staff Officer whom Haig sent to see the French Commanders, returned in the small hours of the morning of November 7th with an assurance that the French troops would reoccupy the line which had been lost during the early hours of that day, and at 9.30 there came a definite message from Foch that this had been accomplished. Actually the French counter-attack had not developed, but a British Brigade of Haig's own force had retaken the ground which had been lost by the French.

At a conference with Sir John French and General Foch,

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Haig again expressed anxiety. General Foch was optimistic as ever. He had given formal orders to the French to attack and to recapture the ground, and this was to him synonymous with accomplishment. Haig with his closer knowledge of the actual fighting in the front line was not reassured. The position was to him one of the gravest anxiety. His brigades were reduced to mere skeletons; the III Brigade, for instance, only numbered five hundred men, and the 22nd Brigade only eight hundred—and these were the two brigades nearest to the threatened flank. Sir John French had no reinforcements to send. Even worse was the position of his artillery; there was no ammunition for the few guns that he had available. Rather than keep the guns suffering hostile fire which they could not return, Haig sent back a considerable portion of his artillery to rest outside the shell-swept area, handing over the small quantity of ammunition to the few batteries retained. Even with this supplement the guns which now remained to face the concentrated fire of two hundred and fifty enemy guns could only be allotted twenty rounds a day for the eighteen-pounders and ten rounds a day for the howitzers.

French General Headquarters maintained that the Germans were moving their troops eastwards, and that only small German attacks were to be expected—and these only for the purpose of covering the withdrawal of the bulk of their troops from the Ypres area. Actually this appreciation of the situation was incorrect: so far from withdrawing their troops, the Germans were massing still greater forces (including the Guards Division, the pick of their Army) for their final and greatest effort to break the British line round Ypres.

The 8th, 9th and 10th November passed fairly quietly on the I Corps front. Everything possible was done to strengthen the front line, and to re-form some reserves at the disposal of the Corps Commander and of his Divisional Commanders. The British Intelligence Service, although its information was not fully accepted either by British or French Headquarters, was in fact at this time well informed of the German strength, and of the dispositions of their units,

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and Haig relied more on his Intelligence reports than did Sir John French. Yet even these reports gave no direct warning of the great attack which was now about to break and which was to mark the culmination of the German effort at Ypres.

At daybreak on November 11th, with a dull mist overshrouding the whole battle area, there began a fierce bombardment of the I Corps front—the fiercest that British troops had yet experienced in the Great War. From 6.30 until 9 a.m. there was a continual rain of shrapnel and of heavy gun fire on the I Corps line. At this period there were not any defences such as those to which the army became accustomed later in the war. There was no regular trench line; there were no deep dug-outs—only short stretches of shallow trenches with occasional planks thrown over them to form a battalion headquarters. So fierce was the fire that even artillery observers and infantry look-outs had to seek some measure of safety, and when at 9 a.m. the German infantry divisions advanced, they were not observed at many points until close on the British front line of trenches. Even so, the discipline and determination of the remnants of the British Regular Army proved equal to the task. In all but one area the German attack made little progress, and was beaten back with enormous casualties. In some places the battle resolved itself into a duel of battalion against battalion, and it is recorded in the “Official History” that one battalion of the Duke of Wellington’s Regiment destroyed almost to the last man the Fusilier Battalion of the Second Guards Grenadiers, but with a loss to the British unit of seven out of their twenty officers and 380 out of 826 men.

Even at the portion of the line where the Germans did succeed in penetrating, their advance was stopped, and most of the line was recovered by sharp counter-attacks. By nightfall the attack had been brought to a standstill, and the Battle of Ypres had been won. Twenty-five battalions—the pick of the German Army, numbering no fewer than 17,500 fresh troops—had been defeated by less than half their number of British troops, exhausted by weeks of continuous fighting, and with inadequate artillery support.

The strain on the Commander had been as great as on

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the troops. He had shared in their hardships and dangers. Not a day had passed without his visiting some portion of the trenches. His own Headquarters had been struck by shells for three days in succession. He had narrowly escaped wounds when visiting the front-line trenches.

On one occasion when he and his Staff Officers were studying a map, a shell had struck the house, killed two of his orderlies, and brought a huge glass candelabra crashing on the table in front of him ; yet Sir John French, who visited him shortly afterwards, found him imperturbable as ever. The glass had been swept off the map, and Haig was still absorbed in his study of the situation.

All his thoughts were for his men. Immediately the battle was over, his chief concern was how soon he could get his battle-worn troops relief, and obtain for them a few days, or even hours, out of the trenches and shell fire. Yet he had maintained the strictest discipline. When it was reported to him that men of some of the regiments were falling back from their trenches without sufficient cause, he ordered them to be tried by court-martial ; and he held the commanding officers of brigades responsible for the immediate reoccupation of abandoned trenches.

Though he fully sympathized with all in the hardships which they had to endure, yet he required a high standard of efficiency and of determination—especially from the higher ranks of officers. When a battalion commander reported to him that he did not think that his battalion was in a fit state to take the field, that the men were broken, and that a period of rest behind the guns was urgently required, Haig commented bitinglly that probably the commanding officer wanted a rest more than his men.

After the 12th November the German attack died down, but for nine more days the exhausted I Corps had to retain its position in the line, and it was not until November 21st that the relief was completed, and that the Corps went back into reserve near Hazebrouck.

Haig himself was granted a few days' leave. He reached London on the 22nd November. "It seemed," he said, "more like a hundred years than a hundred days since we

left Aldershot." But home leave did not mean idleness. He was immediately called to the War Office, and had to prepare a note on his conception of the requirements of the army, based on the experiences it had undergone. He prepared a scheme for the reorganization and for the absorption of the new troops as they were trained, which was subsequently adopted. He impressed on the officials at the War Office the shortage of rifles, the lack of high explosives, and even details such as the footwear of the men did not escape his notice and remark.

His example throughout the period of crisis had inspired his own divisional commanders; each and all of them were constantly in the trench line visiting the troops. Haig commented acidly on the tendency of certain French Generals and their Staffs to rely more on telegrams and written reports than on personal visits.

The French "Formal Order," which at the time was characteristic of the French Staff,\* inspired him with no confidence. He considered that there were too many orders issued, and too little personal supervision devoted to the execution of those orders, and he was convinced that a closer touch between the French senior officers and their men on the battle front would have enhanced the value of the French Army as a fighting force.

By the 27th November he was back in France.

His Corps was still out of the line, and his immediate task was to see to its reorganization, rest, and restoration to efficiency. The gap in the shattered battle line was filled by drafts from home. New Commanding Officers took the place of those who had fallen.

The Indian Corps had arrived in France, and Haig took an early opportunity of visiting the men for whose training he had been so largely responsible.

He noticed with regret that, while the troops appeared in good spirits and ready to fight, there was an atmosphere

\* The reliance which the French Staff placed in the accomplishment of an order, once the order was given, provoked many caustic comments from Haig: "An attack is required? An attack will be made! But certainly a strong attack will be made! The attack has been ordered! And there is never anything more than words."

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of dejection and despondency at the Headquarters of the Corps.

The period of rest which the I Corps now enjoyed lasted exactly a month. General Henderson had succeeded General Lomax in command of the first division, and new Staff Officers had taken the place of those who had fallen in the Battles of the Aisne and Ypres. Reinforcements were arriving to fill the gaps in the units, and the month was spent in training the new men and officers, and restoring the I Corps to its former state of efficiency.

At General Headquarters changes were also impending. Sir John French consulted Haig about a successor to Sir Archibald Murray, whose health had given way under the strain of war. The choice appeared to lie between Wilson and Robertson, although at one time Sir John French had considered that Haig himself should become the Chief of the General Staff. Haig urged on the Commander-in-Chief that the whole Army had confidence in Sir William Robertson, who as Quartermaster-General had never failed to meet the Army's requirements both on the Aisne and at Ypres. Ultimately Robertson was selected to succeed Murray, and General Wilson remained in his post as Sub-Chief of the General Staff.

Shortly before the I Corps' period of rest was over the Commander-in-Chief told Haig that the scheme of regrouping the British Force in Armies had been sanctioned, and that Haig was to have the command of the I Army, which was to include the First, Third and Fourth Corps.

On December 18th the rest of the I Corps was disturbed. The Indian Corps, which was in the front line, on the extreme right of the British line, near Merville, was seriously attacked, and Haig was ordered to send a brigade to its assistance. A staff officer from Corps Headquarters was despatched to report on the situation, and as a result of his report Haig went in person to Merville on the following day, and from there wired to Sir John French recommending the relief of the Indian Corps by the I Corps. Next day Haig took over the command of the front line in relief of the Indian Corps. A few days later there came orders for the formation of the army, and Haig



*Photo : Imperial War Museum*

SIR DOUGLAS HAIG  
AND LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR PERTAB SINGH





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took with him to his new command his Chief Staff Officer,\* his Chief Administrative Officer,† his Intelligence Officer‡ and his personal staff.

From this time onwards his dealings with the troops in the front line were necessarily indirect. His Headquarters were further back, and the line held by his troops was more extensive, yet he still hoped and intended to spend at least part of each day in visiting the units close to—if not actually in—the trenches.

The year drew to an end. In France men were swayed by alternate hopes and fears of the duration of the war. From General Headquarters there came the frequently reiterated view that the war could not last more than a few months longer. The newspapers at home inclined to the same optimistic view, but the Intelligence Service could find few symptoms of any weakening in the German power, and Haig never varied in his view that the war must inevitably continue until the manhood and power of Germany had been utterly exhausted in battle.

On the last day of the year Haig dined with the Staff of the I Army. There was no formality and no rejoicing. It was a quiet friendly meal. On the lips of all was the question: "What has the New Year in store for us?" Haig gave the reply: "We can but hope and go forward to meet what the future may hold with faith and without fear."

\* Brigadier-General John Gough.

† Major-General P. E. F. Hobbs, C.B., C.M.G.

‡ The Author.

## CHAPTER X

### 1915—NEUVE CHAPELLE AND FESTUBERT

IN so far as Great Britain is concerned the year 1915 will not find a place in the pages of history as a period of sound military endeavour; rather it will be remarkable for the diversity of the strategic plans which were recommended, and for the dispersal of the forces available for the prosecution of the war. The standing army of Great Britain had been decimated during the fighting of 1914. The Territorial Army, which in the pre-war military organization was designed to provide the second line of the Army in the Field, had been dispersed mainly to India, to replace the garrison of Regular troops, while only a few units had crossed to France. The new armies were not yet in existence. A series of small campaigns had been undertaken in East Africa, in Mesopotamia, and in the Far East. The Navy had failed to bring the German High-Seas Fleet to battle, and the Grand Fleet, concentrated at Scapa Flow, appeared to be as inactive as though it was itself blockaded.

At the outbreak of war almost all the senior and experienced officers of the General Staff at the War Office had joined the Army in the Field. The officers who had replaced them did not command the confidence either of the Secretary of State for War or of the Cabinet.

Lord Kitchener had not yet learnt to utilize the services of a staff; nor was he prepared to enforce his views on the Cabinet by reasoned arguments. He was accustomed to rely on the weight of his great prestige for the acceptance of his proposals.

If the Cabinet had ever bestowed their complete con-

fidence on Lord Kitchener, they had already withdrawn it, and would not accept his advice without endless discussion and criticism. Cabinet meetings degenerated into interminable debates on strategic plans. Schemes were advanced from all quarters, and each bore the common characteristic of inadequate knowledge of the limitations and requirements of modern warfare. Nor were the authors and advocates of these plans deterred from their prosecution by the opposition of naval and military experts.

The evil was not confined to the Cabinet and the civil authorities; it had spread to the Army itself. The vital requirements of war were subordinated to political expediency, and time and energy were wasted in the prosecution of petty quarrels and personal vendettas.

Sir John French, whose official representations had failed to secure the measures which he considered vital to the existence of the Army in France, had appealed to public opinion through the Press.

In the Cabinet at home and among prominent men who did not hold office under the State, a body of opinion had arisen which was convinced that success could never be achieved in the Western theatre, and that a more suitable front must be discovered where the enemy would prove more vulnerable. There was, however, no unanimity as to an alternative to concentration on the Western Front.

Individual members of the Cabinet felt themselves competent to formulate and to press in discussion various strategical schemes for the employment of the forces of the Crown. Mr. Winston Churchill proved the most insistent, and against the advice of Lord Fisher was urging the ill-fated Dardanelles Expedition; Mr. Lloyd George was pressing for the removal of the whole of the Expeditionary Force—with the exception of a small rearguard—from France to a new theatre of war; while Lord Fisher himself, at the Admiralty, was pressing his own pet proposal that part of the Army should be transferred by sea to the Baltic.

Even the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence had been called on to submit proposals, and had drafted a memorandum advocating the despatch of three corps of

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British troops to act in conjunction with the Grecian and Bulgarian armies in the Balkans and capture Constantinople. The loss of influence of the General Staff at the War Office had removed the constitutional safeguard against the adoption of imperfect and immature schemes.

Lord Kitchener himself at this time was not a convinced believer in the necessity for concentration on the Western Front. He had written to the British Commander-in-Chief in France that "It seemed necessary to recognize that the British Army would never be able to make a break in the German lines sufficient to drive the Germans out of northern Belgium." He urged indeed that the German lines should be regarded as a fortress, which could be neither carried by assault nor invested; and expressed the opinion that "Operations in France should have as their object the holding of the German forces with an adequate Allied strength, while offensive operations proceeded elsewhere."

Even Sir John French from General Headquarters in France had written that, although a victory over the German armies in the West might force the Germans to the Rhine, yet the ultimate decision would be fought out on the Eastern Front. Despite these assertions he was, however, strongly opposed to any withdrawal of the French and British troops from France.

Ultimately a Sub-Committee of the War Council, presided over by Lord Kitchener, investigated the question of the movement of British military forces to some other theatre than France, and made the recommendation that the most effective diversion could be created in the Balkan Peninsula, in the hope that operations opened there in conjunction with Serbia would result in the neutral Balkan States entering the war on the Allied side.

Nor was the situation more reassuring in Paris. The anti-clerical party was urging the claims of General Sarrail to high military office; and the French Prime Minister, though still convinced of the importance of concentration on the Western Front, was planning the despatch of an army under General Sarrail to the Balkans. This move appears to have been undertaken more to allay political unrest

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and discontent than from any belief in the efficiency of the strategy.

All these activities were being pushed forward in the face of uncompromising opposition from General Joffre. Supported by the main body of military opinion both in Britain and France, including Haig and Foch, he never wavered in his conviction that men and guns must at all cost be concentrated in the West; that the way to end the war was to kill Germans, not Turks; and that side-shows in the Balkans and Turkey might be sound politically, but that from the military point of view it was a mistake to scatter a small army by having more than one objective. We find in fact the history of the early years of the 19th century repeating itself, the Dardanelles and Salonika taking the place of the Island of Walcheren and the West Indies, where British resources were squandered and British lives lost in a fruitless search for success outside the main theatre of war during the struggle of the Napoleonic Wars. Now, as then, the Government wished for rapid and decisive strategical results: they sought a short cut to success, which they believed could not be achieved through a repetition of the costly battles of 1914. Acting as spokesman for many of his colleagues, Mr. Winston Churchill condemned as "frantic and sterile" the efforts in the West, where the great armies of the Allies, locked in battle with the main forces of their adversaries, were slowly but surely eating away the very heart of Germany's strength. Mr. Winston Churchill and his supporters not unnaturally measured success or failure with dividers on a map, and gave no thought to the teaching of military history throughout the ages.

Haig, though not in a position either to be asked for, or to offer, an official opinion, had no doubts of the correct and effective policy; and he had many opportunities of giving unofficial expression to his views.

He contended that there was nothing abnormal in the long and fluctuating wearing-out battles. He had taught in peace what he now perceived in war. The Great War—like all others—would not be won until the spirit of the German people was conquered, and "the will to fight" extinguished;

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and this could only be achieved by the defeat of her main armies massed in the West. Her resistance must be worn down by a continuous battering on her frontier from the strategic centre of France and Belgium, until the time came for the delivery of the decisive blow.

Detached campaigns against her allies—Turkey, Austria and Bulgaria—even if successful, could have but one result on the main front. They would provide time and opportunity for Germany's recovery from the blows she had received ; they would enable her to restore her depleted units ; and would revive the moral and spirit of the German nation, which must be broken to allow of defeat. In Salonika, the Dardanelles, and the Baltic—all the cherished schemes of the Easterners, whose rival merits were so hotly debated in the War Cabinet at home—Haig saw a departure from first principles. To him these efforts seemed as futile as if a boxer in the ring wasted his energy in knocking out his opponent's seconds.

While the Governments and War Offices of France and Britain were engaged in strategic controversy, the war in the West did not halt. Joffre was planning great battles for the spring of 1915, and Haig, now in command of the I Army, was fully occupied in organizing and training his force. The fame of the I Corps had risen high under his command. It was unrivalled in the British Army, and he now sought to bring the III and IV Corps (which with the I Corps, formed his new army) up to the same level. The long winter days were spent in ceaseless supervision of each detail of organization, and training. Every department was examined, tested and perfected ; but to two in particular he devoted special care. In every battle of 1914 he had realized how great the value of an adequate Intelligence Service would be. At Mons, on the Aisne, and at Ypres it had been the same—battles engaged without sufficient information, opportunities lost because of inaccurate forecasts. He was determined that this should not recur. The Intelligence Service in the field was still further developed to a high efficiency under his guidance.

Every scrap of information—no matter what its apparent

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insignificance—was collected from every available source, examined and tabulated.

Deductions had to be sharply separated from authenticated facts, and at any moment that he might demand it he expected his Intelligence Service to have ready that “reasoned statement and argument” that was to his mind the first essential for decisive action.

He never omitted the daily conference with the Head of his Intelligence Service, with which both during the period of command of the I Army and subsequently as Commander-in-Chief he began his day’s work, and he held his Corps and Divisional Commanders responsible for keeping in similar close touch with all available information. He took an especial interest in the rapid development of the Air Service, which provided new and valuable means of obtaining information of the enemy’s movements.

Like the Intelligence Service, the Medical Service received his closest personal attention. South Africa had shown him how disease could devastate an army. Successful though the medical arrangements had been throughout 1914, the sick casualties were a severe drain on the strength of his troops, and a sick man was as much a loss to the army as a casualty in action.

He gave the whole weight of his support to the medical officers in their combat with illness. He kept in personal touch with their work. Nothing that they asked was refused. During those winter months a new ailment, popularly called “Trench Feet,” was decimating the units in the front-line trenches. One division lost three thousand men in its first week, and over twenty thousand sufferers from this complaint were invalided from the Army during the winter of 1914-15. Haig pressed the doctors insistently to provide a remedy. It is impossible to subject science to discipline, and it cannot be claimed that it was solely due to this insistence that the remedy was found; but those who have served in an army will appreciate the assistance and force lent to medical efforts by the sympathy and support of the Commander.

Haig’s care and attention to the general principles of health brought in the long run their own reward in a rapidly



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diminishing sick-rate, but at the time it exposed him to severe criticism, and threatened to brand him with the reputation of a crank, who was prepared to sacrifice training to medical fads and theories.

Haig had taken with him to the I Army most of the Staff Officers who had served with him in the I Corps, and he had hoped to retain them for the battles of 1915, but the winter brought changes. His Chief Staff Officer, General John Gough, who had been with him since the beginning of the war, was offered the command of one of the new divisions at home. Always averse to changes in his immediate staff, it was no small sacrifice for Haig to part with his Chief of Staff, when he himself was just undertaking additional responsibilities. Gough had shown tireless energy, calmness in crisis, and a courage and confidence equal to Haig's own ; and to a high opinion of Gough's military qualities was added a warm personal regard.

Gough, on his part, at once offered to decline this chance of promotion and remain with his Chief ; but Haig, much as he would have liked to retain his services, refused to accept this generous suggestion, and Gough was actually under orders to proceed home to take up his new appointment, when, on a farewell visit to his own old battalion, he was mortally wounded by a German sniper. Haig was deeply affected, and for almost the only time in the war he allowed a personal incident to interfere with the normal routine of his work. A staff officer was sent to bring Gough back from the front-line trenches to the operating theatre, and the Chief Surgeon of the Army (Sir Berkeley Moynihan) was deputed to await him there and try and save Gough's life by an operation. In spite of all that human care and skill could do Gough died early the following morning.\* He was succeeded at I Army Headquarters by General R. H. Butler, who had been the second General Staff Officer at Aldershot, and who subsequently accompanied Haig to General Headquarters as Deputy-Chief of the General Staff.

General Gough's death had occurred at the very moment

\* Gough's name appeared in the *Gazette* for a C.B. on the very day that he received his wound, and an officer was sent to give him the news as he lay in the trenches.

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that the calm of the winter months was about to be dispelled by new military operations. News had reached the Allied Headquarters of a German withdrawal of eight cavalry divisions from the Western to the Eastern Front, and the transmission of twelve new divisions to that area preparatory to an offensive against Russia. Thus, between November, 1914, and January, 1915, it was calculated that the number of German infantry divisions in France had fallen from one hundred and six to ninety-eight, and even those that remained were fully twenty per cent. below their full war establishment. Joffre proposed to take advantage of this weakening of the German force to deliver three great attacks by the French troops in the centre and south of their line. His plans, comprehensive though they were, did not at first include any active co-operation by the British troops in France, and he did not propose to ask the British to do more than maintain their line in defence.

During the operations in November and December, 1914, some misunderstandings had arisen between Sir John French and General Joffre. The French Headquarters thought that the British had not borne their full share of the fighting, and that pledges had not been fulfilled, and there was accordingly a general atmosphere of mutual suspicion and some reluctance to co-operate. Sir John French was determined, however, that his army should not be wholly debarred from participation in the forthcoming offensive, from which he anticipated great results—perhaps even decisive victory—and he called on his Army Commanders for schemes for attack on their several fronts.

It was in answer to this demand that Haig prepared in outline the plan which subsequently developed into the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. Haig's army at the time occupied the front from Cuinchy and the La Bassée Canal to Bois Grenier. The trenches lay in the sodden meadow land of the valley of the Lys and the Laye. Immediately in front of them and overlooking them was the Aubers Ridge, some sixty feet higher than the British trenches, and approached by a gentle slope. Between the British line and the Aubers Ridge there were formidable obstacles: there was the village of Neuve

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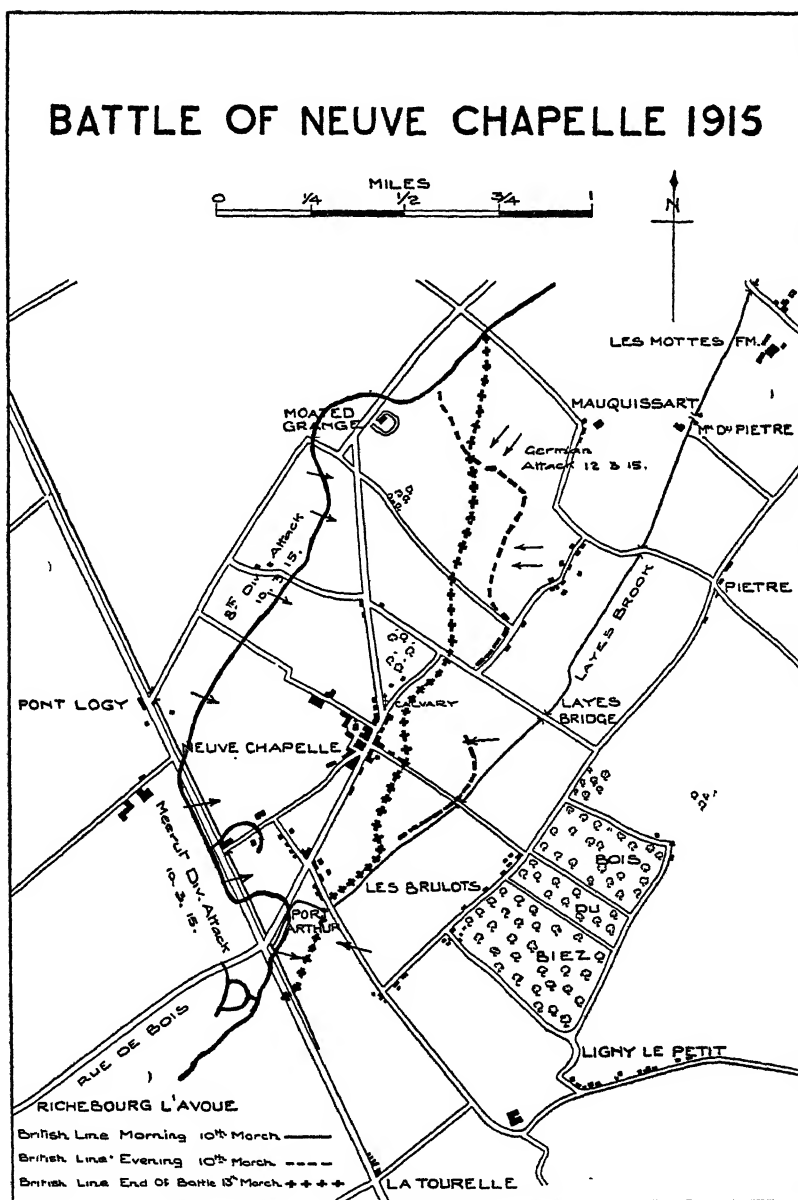
Chapelle, strongly defended by the Germans, round which a small but fierce battle had raged in 1914 ; there was the Bois de Biez, a large rectangular wood, forming a difficult military obstacle to any advance. If the difficulties were great, the advantages which would be afforded by success more than counterbalanced them. The capture of the Aubers Ridge would give the Army dry ground, secure from observation, and would afford them an admirable jumping-off place for future operations.

The plan which Haig submitted for the battle of Neuve Chapelle had as its objective the capture of the ridge. The British attack was to be delivered at the same time, but independent of the blow of the French army. Before battle was joined the lack of co-operation between the Allied Headquarters brought unexpected and unforeseen vicissitudes, which threatened to disorganize the whole operation.

While the scheme was still under consideration, Sir John French received unexpected news that General Joffre proposed to entrust a French attack to the army under General Maud'huy. General Maud'huy was in command of the French force immediately on Haig's right, and thus it seemed possible that the French and British attacks could mutually support one another. Under this scheme Haig's operations would assume the shape of the left wing of a joint attack on a total frontage of seventy-one miles from Arras practically to Lille.

Haig welcomed the extension of this plan and proceeded at once to consult with General Maud'huy as to its execution. Then to his surprise he learnt that Maud'huy's attack was dependent on the British taking over more front-line trenches from the French. Without the troops thus freed General Joffre would not be able to supply Maud'huy with the force he required. But similarly if the British had to find more troops for the trench line, Haig would not have sufficient troops for his own attack.

There was a deadlock, and for a time it seemed as though the whole British plan would be abandoned. Haig, however, insisted that even as an isolated effort the attack on the Aubers



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Ridge might still achieve valuable results—not indeed a breakthrough or anything approaching a decisive battle, but a great improvement in the British position, which would more than compensate for the anticipated expenditure of lives and material. Sir John French concurred, and the preparations for the battle, as originally designed, were pressed forward.

It was Haig's first experience of controlling an attack rather than personally directing it at close quarters. It was the first formal and prearranged battle in which the British troops took part in the war. The previous fighting had belonged to the category of encounter battles—a series of situations arising unforeseen, and met by rapid decisions of the local commanders. Now it was a definite case of the initiative resting with the British. The line about to be attacked was sparsely held by the Germans—not more than two divisions holding a part against which six divisions could be concentrated, and according to the Intelligence estimates not more than four thousand reinforcements could reach the Germans on the first day, and sixteen thousand on the second day. Haig had the most careful and detailed plans prepared for the battle. He envisaged it in three stages, each to succeed the other rapidly but methodically. He knew the difficulty of foreseeing events after the first encounter, but he hoped to retain control and to be able to resume it as each successive objective was attained. It is noticeable that in every one of Haig's battles he sought by some entirely novel adaptation of resources to secure surprise of the enemy with all its attendant advantages. At Neuve Chapelle his mind turned to the artillery. He had already a very clear idea of the primary importance of artillery co-operation. On the Aisne he had initiated control of artillery fire by aeroplane observation. Now he introduced to the British Army for the first time in warfare the system of an organized artillery barrage, which became (with alterations to meet different conditions) an integral feature of all future attacks. The massed artillery fire would first destroy the enemy defence, and then, lifting over the German trench, would prevent the defenders escaping and reinforcements reaching them. He looked to the

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battle to prevent that portion of the line developing into siege warfare, and he was prepared to risk much to accomplish this.

He had no hope of a decisive break in the German line. The troops which he had available, though more numerous than in any other British attack, were few when compared with the great mass used in the French attacks, and in other portions of the German line. But if the French efforts were rewarded by a large measure of success, the whole German line might crumble, and in the process Haig's own attack at Neuve Chapelle might become decisive.

The initial attack up to the first objective was successful. The carefully prepared plans were put into execution with scarcely a hitch. Haig at his Headquarters at Merville received by telephone message after message reporting positions gained, prisoners taken at the cost of only small casualties to his own force. He ordered up the cavalry with high hopes of success. But the experience—so often to be repeated in the later years of the war—of the difficulty of controlling troops once engaged in battle, now for the first time was his. Co-operation between adjoining units, even between corps, was faulty and incomplete. At Ypres in 1914 a small group of determined British troops had brought the attack of a numerically superior force to a standstill; now the rôle was reversed, and the Germans showed a tenacity as great as that of their opponents. Haig knew that in any battle it is determination that decides. He recalled the facts of 1914 when the Germans had been so near to success, and ordered further efforts. For two days the issue hung in the balance—then reinforcements reached the Germans; a strong counter-attack developed, and the battle ended with the British line advanced to a maximum depth of 1,200 yards, on a frontage of two and a half miles, but still far from the Aubers Ridge.

Haig was not satisfied. The losses had been heavy, particularly in officers, and the results had fallen far short of the objective. From the first inception of the plan, he had realized that with the small number of troops at his disposal success depended on the rapidity with which the advance

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could be made. He had estimated the time required for the Germans to bring to the battle area sufficient troops to stop the attack. The forecast had proved correct, and he now knew that any other attempt on this immediate front could not succeed. He had still hopes of obtaining his objective by another attack to be delivered a short distance to the north, before the Germans could fully recover from the blow which they had received. But his immediate task was a searching investigation into the causes that had impeded the progress of the attack. Those fleeting opportunities, on the importance of which Haig laid so much stress, had passed without advantage being taken of them.

The Battle of Neuve Chapelle provided valuable lessons for Haig himself. The command of an Army was the transition stage between the direct command of troops and the appointment to supreme command. The delay between the issue of orders and their execution had made him impatient. It was this very delay that he had criticized so severely in the French Army; and on the first day of the battle he had gone forward to interview the brigade and divisional commanders and to try to take control himself; moreover, he had sternly censured both divisional and corps commanders for lack of energy.

By the end of the battle he had realized that these rebukes were premature—if not indeed unwarranted. The inevitable circumstances of battle rendered rapid transmission of orders difficult, and time-table progress well-nigh impossible. It will be found that in his criticism of General Nivelle's plans two years later he emphasized this very fact which was brought home to him at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle.

Although the Battle of Neuve Chapelle had failed to achieve full results, it had far-reaching effects on the subsequent operations. It was the first methodically planned British offensive; it laid down the lines on which all future operations were conducted, and it illustrated and emphasized the difficulties that would have to be overcome. It showed that it was possible to break the German line. It explained the difficulties of command. The problem became one of almost mathematical calculation—a given force on a given front

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could with reasonable certainty effect a definite indentation in the German line. Instead of the haphazard and often contradictory orders which had reached the fighting units from General Headquarters in the past, there was now order and method and a carefully prepared plan based on a detailed examination of all the information available.

Ammunition became of vital importance. On the last day of the battle more ammunition was expended than could at the time be produced in the whole of Great Britain in seventeen days, and from this time onwards the appeal for more adequate supplies of ammunition became increasingly insistent.

Immediately the battle was over, Haig went to General Headquarters to discuss the possibility of renewing extensive operations on the same front. There he heard to his dismay that the indecision and vacillating policy at home were leading to a further reduction in the amount of ammunition despatched to France. The Dardanelles were sucking at the life-stream of supplies, on which alone the army in France could feed and exist. "The lack of ammunition," he commented, "is more than serious: it is completely preventing us from profiting by our success by driving back the enemy before he can reorganize and strengthen his position."

There could be no further operations in the immediate future, and Haig took a few days' leave and went home. He stayed at Folkestone, playing golf and resolutely refusing to see any politician or statesman; he even asked to be excused from going to see the King.

On his return he found that General Headquarters, in the report of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle which it had submitted, had usurped all the credit for the plan of battle—a plan which had actually been worked out by Haig and his Staff, submitted to General Headquarters and had received unqualified approval.

Haig's Staff were indignant. He himself, though he would not take the action which his Staff urged on him, was not unmoved; but with his customary philosophy he dismissed the incident with the comment: "It is unmanly to take credit which belongs to others, yet it is not uncommon:



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some people cannot resist the temptation to be in the centre of the picture."

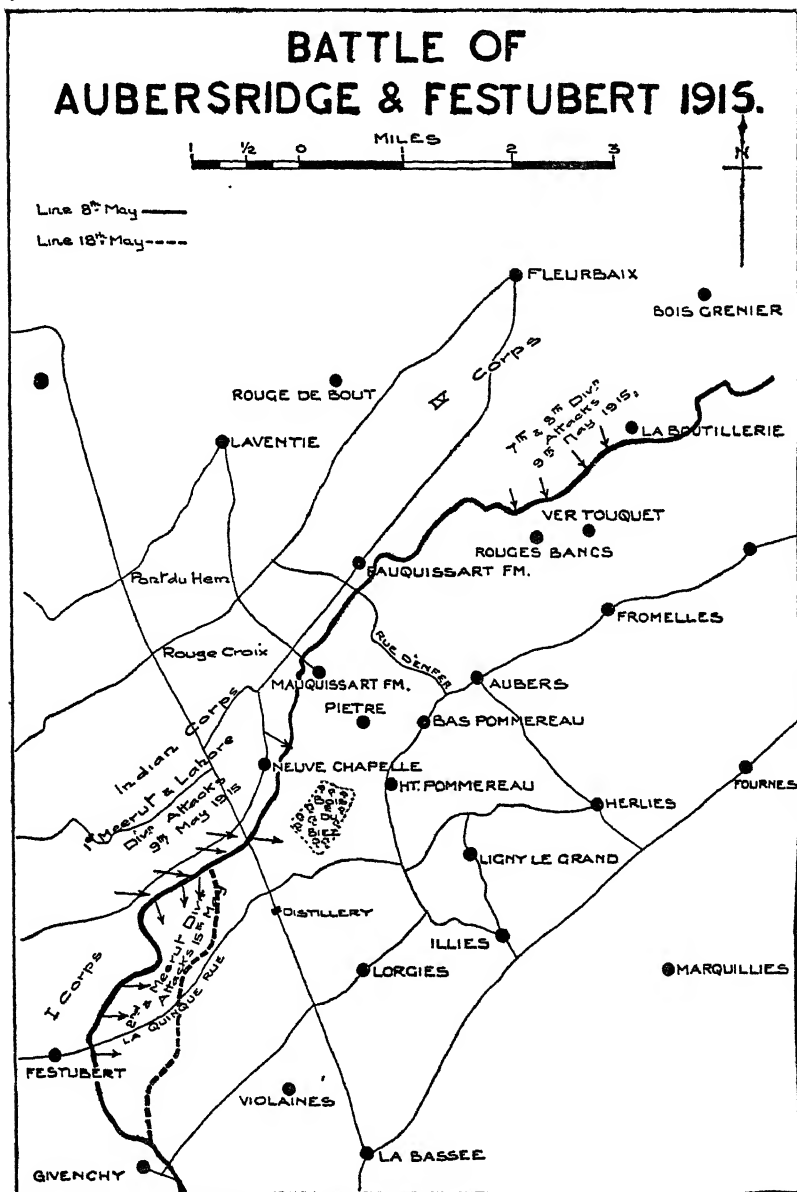
The Battle of Neuve Chapelle, however, had even more far-reaching effects; it focused attention upon the I Army and its Commander. For the first time the British Army had proved that it could attack as well as defend, and both French Allies and German opponents were obliged to alter their estimation of its value as a fighting force, and to recognize the new factor on the Western Front.

Hitherto the French had looked to the British mainly to take over sections of the line and thus set free French troops for attack. From Neuve Chapelle onwards the British were asked to take an ever increasing share in the actual offensive operations. As early as April, 1915, we find General Joffre asking Sir John French for British co-operation in the next decisive attack which would take place on the Allied front, and despatching each of his corps commanders to visit Haig's Headquarters to learn from the I Army Commander the secret of successful attack on the formidable German defences.

Indeed Joffre went even further. Just about the time of Neuve Chapelle a French attack in a distant part of the line failed, and the French Commander was quick to draw comparisons between the two efforts—much to the disadvantage of the French Commander, whom he removed from his command. The latter was, however, able to show that the fault did not lie solely with him. He argued that Haig had been given a free hand at Neuve Chapelle, while Joffre's own Staff had issued to him very detailed but inadequate orders, which he had faithfully executed. Joffre immediately acknowledged the justice of the French Commander's plea, transferred his displeasure from the Commander in the field to his own Staff, and removed the officer responsible from his appointment.

On the German side the effects of Neuve Chapelle became apparent by an immediate increase in the density of their troops holding the line opposite the British. Until Neuve Chapelle the Germans had been content to hold the line against the British with a few troops, and had thus invited the

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blow. Now they were quick to appreciate the danger. The line was strengthened, and from this time onwards there were more Germans for each yard of front held by the British than for the ground held by the French.

Moreover, the fame of the achievements of the British was not restricted to the fighting front, but had reached Berlin itself; and Haig, always appreciative of praise, received from Lord Esher the flattering news that the Kaiser had stated in an interview with an American that the British I Corps under Haig was the best in the world. Haig, always anxious to give due credit to others, replied that the success of his command was due entirely to the excellent staff, which had worked together in peace, and which had trained the troops with him at Aldershot. "It was," he said, "a compliment to Aldershot methods and Aldershot training, rather than to my own command in battle."

From Great Britain also the news of Neuve Chapelle brought a constant succession of visitors from the Cabinet and others in high places at home seeking first-hand information about the I Army and its Commander. During his time at Aldershot Haig had met singularly few people of political importance, apart from those immediately concerned with the War Office. Lord Haldane he had known for many years. He had made the acquaintance of Mr. Asquith during the short period which intervened between the troubles in Ulster and the outbreak of the war, but with these two exceptions he was not personally acquainted with any single civilian member of the Cabinet. The Ministers now sought him out. Lord Curzon, Mr. A. J. Balfour, the Prime Minister and Lord Kitchener followed one another to Army Headquarters.

Haig welcomed the chance which their visits afforded of bringing home to the responsible and influential men of Great Britain the realities of war. He listened patiently to each one of his visitors, but he rarely offered any opinion on a subject not entirely concerned with his own work. He noted that no one from Great Britain appeared to him to have the least idea of the vast number of guns, or ammunition, or of the tremendous effort required in modern war-

fare. Each visitor was despatched to the map rooms to study the large scale maps of the theatre of war and to hear, from officers who had actually taken part in each battle, an account of the situation as it appeared to those in France; and each visitor left Army Headquarters not only with greatly increased knowledge of war conditions and war problems, but also greatly impressed by the sense of power and strength emanating from the reserved, courteous, but very determined soldier, who in his more emphatic moments tended to lapse into broad Doric.

General Foch was among the visitors to I Army Headquarters, and for the first time Foch and Haig had a prolonged discussion on the war in all its bearings. During the Battle of Ypres they had had communication as commanders of adjoining forces, but hitherto they had never been brought into close personal contact. Haig noted with interest Foch's definite statement that during peace time neither he nor any of the French Staff had considered the possibility of fighting in Flanders. They had indeed considered the plan of fighting in every part of France and Germany, but Flanders as a possible theatre of war had entirely escaped their calculations.

While it is probable that each one of the Cabinet Ministers who visited Haig was already contemplating the necessity of a successor being found for Sir John French, yet Haig himself at this period did not consider that any change in the supreme command was within the bounds of possibility. He had strongly disapproved of Sir John French's incursions into home politics, and his attempts at Government coercion through the Press. He had noted with some alarm the growing intimacy between Sir John French and General Wilson, and the exclusion of General Robertson from French's personal mess and from his councils. With his knowledge of Sir John French's limitations and General Wilson's propensity for intrigue, he had realized that such an arrangement was courting trouble, and that the inevitable sufferer would be the Commander-in-Chief. But his own relations with the Commander-in-Chief were cordial, and he neither anticipated nor desired that Sir John French should relinquish his command.

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A characteristic conversation took place between the two men shortly after the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. French—ever optimistic about the duration of the war—asked Haig whether on its termination he would like to go to India as Commander-in-Chief. Haig, with his usual Scottish caution, replied that he would be prepared to go wherever he was sent, but that the first thing was to consider the way to end the war, and not disturb one's thoughts by speculations about events after the war. "Perhaps," he concluded sardonically, "India might not even be a British possession requiring a Commander-in-Chief."

Towards the end of April the centre of interest shifted from the I Army Front up to the extreme left of the British line. The Germans, using for the first time asphyxiating gas, attacked near the Ypres salient. The surprise to the French and to the British troops was complete. A wide gap developed between the French and British, and part of the I Army were hurried up to fill the gap and restore the situation. Haig, though not immediately concerned, closely investigated all the circumstances and gave his conclusions. In his view, the French should never have allowed themselves to be surprised in such a manner. Suitable provision to meet a sudden attack would have prevented its occurrence. The instance confirmed his opinion that the French generals were a strange admixture of average, but not more than average, capacity, and ignorance of the actual conditions in the front-line trenches. He considered them too excitable for modern warfare, and he noted that they never seemed to give due consideration to possible action by the enemy, nor were they prepared to look a nasty situation in the face, and take steps to meet it.

The criticism shows not only Haig's view of the capabilities of the French Commanders, but also the standard which he had set for himself, and which he succeeded in attaining to a remarkable extent. To him the first requirement of successful leadership in war, whether in high or in subordinate command, was the capacity for calm reasoning. Optimism and pessimism were distasteful to him: the optimism, which took no note of the enemy's powers and plans

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and discounted the difficulties, and the pessimism, which dwelt on the results of possible failure without considering the advantages to be achieved by success, were alike alien to his nature. The position must be accurately gauged in the light of the fullest information available of the enemy's dispositions and his plans, and his strategical intentions must be deduced from the study of the mentality of the hostile leaders.

As soon as the situation on the northern flank had reached stability, the I Army was again called on to take an active part in a big attack. General Joffre had now planned an attack which was to include British troops on the north and French troops on the south of the La Bassée Canal. The three corps of the I Army were to provide the British contingent, amounting to some one hundred thousand bayonets and six hundred guns to attack on a front of eight miles: the French to the south of the Canal, with almost exactly double this number of men and guns, were to attack fifteen miles of front, but while the front to be attacked took due note of this number of troops, there was a marked difference in the amount of ammunition available. The British attack could only muster enough ammunition for one hour's bombardment, whereas the ammunition on the French front was almost unlimited.

The operations, therefore, did not start with any high hopes of great achievement. Neither Sir John French nor Haig—had they been free agents at this time—would have adventured the British forces in an attack during a period when the ammunition reserves were slowly being built up after the great expenditure at Neuve Chapelle, and before the resources of British man-power were available to fill the gaps in the ranks of the infantry.

The position on the northern flank of the British Armies was still grave and gave rise to considerable anxiety. The French had completely failed to redeem their pledges of retaking the ground lost at the time when the Germans first used cloud gas; and General Foch, in this area, was making insistent demands for further British efforts. General Joffre was also planning a great offensive to capture the Vimy Ridge and was complaining to Sir John French that

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the British were not lending him sufficient assistance, and that British eyes were fixed too firmly on the Flanders area. Before the pressure of General Joffre's demands Sir John French gave way, and the I Army—not yet fully rested from its ordeal at Neuve Chapelle—was called on to attack and assist the forthcoming French offensive.

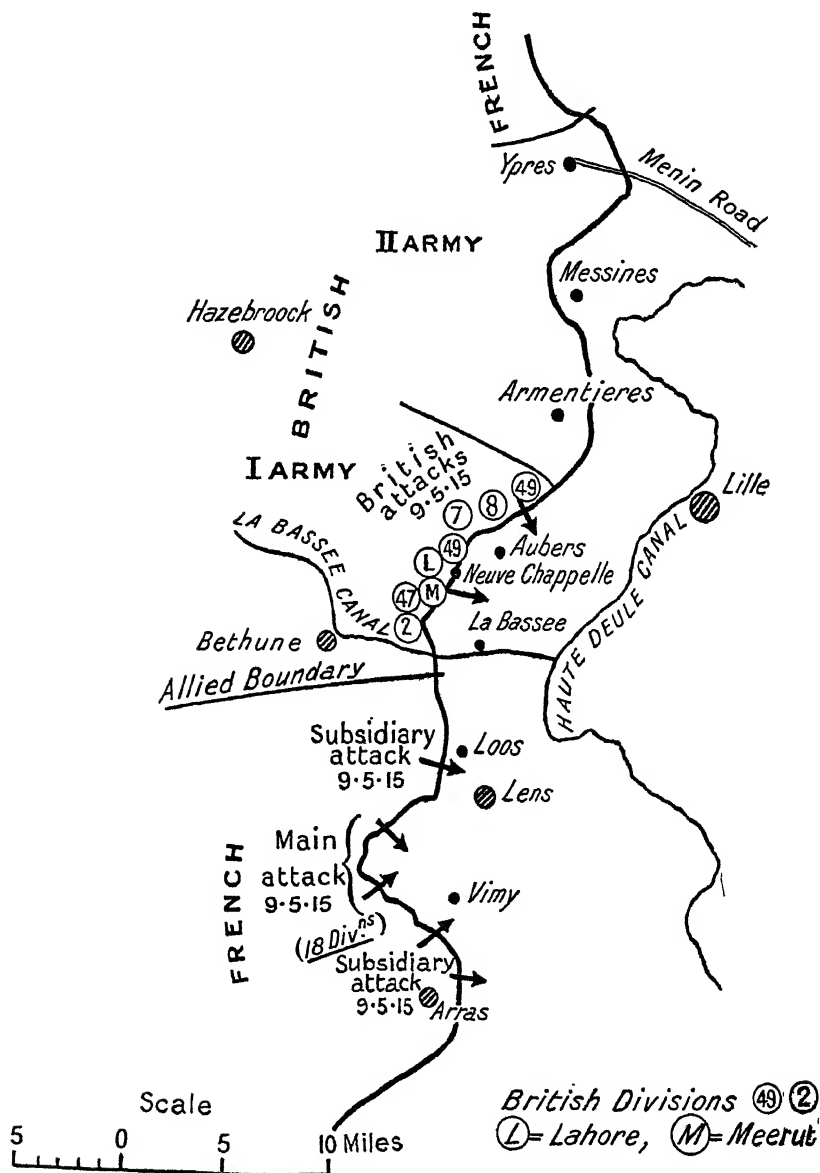
Although the attack was planned mainly at the instigation of the French Commander-in-Chief, yet a survey of the situation immediately in front of Haig's army appears to have led to hopes of success, which were not to be fulfilled. "The strength of your army in the early days of the battle," General Headquarters wrote, "is far superior to the hostile forces in front of you. The enemy has suffered heavy losses in the fighting near Arras, and he has few or no reserves—other than local—to bring up."

On the 9th of May an attack on the Neuve Chapelle model with short preliminary bombardments by the IV Corps and the Indian Corps sought to seize the high ground of the Aubers Ridge lying north-east of Neuve Chapelle, but made no progress, mainly if not entirely owing to inadequate supplies of ammunition for the artillery. Both French and Haig would willingly have ceased for the time all further attack until artillery ammunition could be accumulated, but the French Army was still heavily engaged and it was necessary to renew the attack to draw German reserves away from the French front.

After the bombardment, reports from the front indicated that all the obstacles in front of the advancing troops had not been destroyed. Nevertheless there was a considerable initial success, and the enemy were forced to withdraw from the carefully prepared position on which they had spent months of labour, to the hastily constructed defensive line a short distance behind. Had it been possible to attack this at once the success might have been carried forward and important results obtained, but artillery support was lacking. The Dardanelles were still exacting their inexorable toll on the limited output of munitions from British factories, and the attack had to wait the slow accumulation of further supplies; when these arrived the favourable moment had passed.

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## ALLIED ATTACKS, MAY, 1915.





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The plan for the continuance of the battle, now arranged between Sir John French and Haig, followed the methods adopted on the French front. There was to be a long bombardment, followed by an infantry attack with limited objectives. The attack was to be "deliberate and persistent." "The enemy should never be given a complete rest either by day or night, but be gradually and relentlessly worn down by exhaustion and loss until his defence collapses." This plan of offensive rendered the element of surprise—so important a factor in modern warfare—impossible, and the objects of the attack were very carefully limited. On the night of the 15th and again on the 16th and 17th May, therefore, the attack was renewed on the Festubert front (between Neuve Chapelle and La Bassée) and succeeded in capturing the front system of German defences and carried forward the British line by a few hundred yards. But there was not sufficient artillery ammunition to make good the advantage, and by the end of the month the fighting died down.

Lord Kitchener had never entertained any expectations of success. "Sir John French," he wrote, "may possibly have seven divisions in reserve, also a good supply of artillery ammunition, which he thought would be sufficient. It may be doubtful whether this will enable him to break through; but the French have an almost unlimited supply of ammunition, including H.E., and fourteen divisions in reserve, so if they cannot get through we may take it that the line cannot be forced." In actual fact the supply of artillery ammunition was very far from being adequate.

But if at the end of the operations the I Army found itself without any great advantage in conquered territory, it had at least achieved its object of drawing towards its own front the German reinforcements, which would otherwise have been available to oppose the French attack further south. Moreover, the operations had impressed on Haig the conviction that with sufficient artillery ready to support an infantry attack, the German lines were not impregnable; and that the British Army, now drawing its reinforcements from the mass of the nation, would with suitable training be the equal of the Regular Army which had fought the first battle of Ypres.

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For the time being, however, all thought of further operations was out of the question.

The small reserves of ammunition which had been laboriously collected after the battle of Neuve Chapelle were all spent. Men, guns and ammunition were now being diverted from France to the Dardanelles. The campaign there, begun on the understanding that it would only require a few men, was now absorbing the divisions of Kitchener's Army almost as fast as they were ready to take the field. Nor did there appear to be any prospect either of a definite result or of the decrease in the drain upon the man-power and resources of the Empire.

Intrigue and counter-intrigue were rife at home. Even officers of high rank were deeply involved, while in the fighting theatre the attenuated line waited in the sodden trenches with hardly a round of ammunition until a saner and more mature judgment should reassert itself at home in the council chamber.

Active operations were thus impossible, but, even so, General Headquarters, looking far ahead, were already considering in what direction another blow could be dealt before the end of the year. Towards the end of May Sir John French asked Haig to submit plans for an offensive should an opportunity arise. Forthwith Haig began the preparation of the plans which, four months later, developed into the Battle of Loos.\*

Although on purely strategical grounds both French and Haig would have preferred to renew the attacks in the northern area, where even a small advance would have freed the troops from the winter quagmires of the low-lying ground of the Lys Valley, and would have brought them nearer to their strategical objective—the railway system supplying the German armies—the inadequacy of guns and ammunition formed an insuperable obstacle.

By this time he had begun to feel the inconvenience of his imperfect knowledge of the French language. He disliked having to rely on an interpreter, and during the months that intervened between Festubert and Loos he resolutely set

\* See Chapter XI., p. 164.

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himself to acquire a more complete knowledge of the language.

One of the French liaison officers attached to his Headquarters—Captain Gemeau—proved an efficient and willing instructor, and for two hours every day Haig and Gemeau might be seen studying French—working out exercises and compositions, much in the same way as any public schoolboy works at the language at home. He made rapid progress, and by the end of the summer was able to converse fluently, and also, by a curious twist of mentality, to express himself far more coherently and articulately in French than in English. All his life his mind had worked faster than his tongue, and he had contracted a habit of breaking off a sentence and leaving the rest to the imagination of his listeners. Even if the sentence did chance to have an end, as often as not he would have omitted the verb. Only Staff Officers who thoroughly understood their Commander's mind could grasp his meaning from his spoken word.

While this was the case when he spoke, no man had a greater command of forcible expression in writing than had Haig.\* He wrote without effort and with hardly a correction, and it appeared to be the same brain cell that functioned when he spoke a foreign tongue. His speech in French came slow, definite, in perfect grammar, and with every sentence simply and clearly enunciated.

The series of visits from those in high positions at home, which had begun with the formation of the I Army, had now developed into a continuous stream. Amongst his visitors was Lord Northcliffe. Contrary opinions might be held about the great journalist's methods, but there could be no doubt of his powerful influence over public opinion.

Confident in their belief of the favourable opinion that a personal interview with Haig made on all who came in contact with him, and with the co-operation of personal friends of Lord Northcliffe, Haig's Staff arranged the visit

\* One of the senior staff officers at General Headquarters is said to have remarked, after attending a conference between Sir Douglas Haig and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien: "If Haig could only speak as clearly as Horace, and if Horace could only write as clearly as Haig, I would be better able to understand what was in their minds."

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and the interview between these two men, each great in his own sphere.

The officers who had arranged the meeting without Haig's knowledge, awaited the result with some trepidation, but its success exceeded their highest expectations.

No two men could have been more unlike either in outlook or in personal characteristics, but each was at once impressed with the qualities of the other. Northcliffe's remark as he walked back from Haig's quarters after a long conversation was significant. "That," he said, "is the one indispensable man in Britain to-day." For many succeeding months Northcliffe remained a staunch supporter of Haig. When, in 1917, Haig was exposed to the Prime Minister's resentment owing to his expression of some views (diametrically opposed to those entertained by the Prime Minister) to a small group of foreign correspondents, Lord Northcliffe brought the whole weight of his influence to bear to counteract the Prime Minister's displeasure, and it was largely due to his efforts that the incident subsided without serious friction.

During the autumn of 1915 Haig devoted much attention to the collection of all available information about the general situation in France and the potentialities of the German Empire, although this was primarily the business of General Headquarters. It appeared to him vital that in the preparation of the plan of operations for his own army he should be completely conversant with these details which might have a decisive bearing on the fate of the battle. He was not satisfied with the scanty information issued by the French and British Headquarters. He caused the liaison officers attached to his Staff to report periodically on the prevailing feeling at French General Headquarters, and in France generally, and he also sought to amplify from various sources the information received through official channels of the military resources of the French.

He directed his own Intelligence Service to obtain from all available sources—from the French Army, from British General Headquarters and from the British and foreign Press—information about the capacity and resources of the German nation. By the end of June he had formed the definite

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opinion that the preponderance of German power had reached its zenith, and that the enemy were already suffering from difficulties in their supplies of ammunition, so that their fighting power was being even more seriously impaired than the British.

Although already in France, even at this period, some measure of "war weariness" existed, the slow, steady influx of British reinforcements into France was more than sufficient to counteract the disadvantages of this spirit. As the weeks passed Haig became more and more decided in his views of the probable duration and issue of the war, and already referred openly in conversations with his Staff to the possibility of a successful termination of the war by the end of 1916, or in the early days of 1917.

Ever mindful of the good effect on the moral of the troops of distraction and amusements during their period of rest from the front line, Haig paid periodical visits to the competitions and entertainments which were organized behind the line. For those who picture the period as one of incessant fighting it is difficult even now to realize that behind the line there was a type of life in progress not unlike that of peaceful times in foreign stations. At a horse show, for instance—organized by the Indian cavalry, and held on a bright summer's day—with its masses of motor cars and two French bands discoursing classical music, and with the equipment polished and glistening—Haig noted a striking resemblance to other functions which he had attended in more peaceful days in Simla.

As yet there was no suggestion that Sir John French should be relieved of his command, but it was inevitable that the reactions from the Press campaign, initiated by Sir John French against Lord Kitchener, should direct men's minds to the question of possible alterations in the supreme command. During the whole summer of 1915 efforts were being made to extract from Haig his opinion of the military capacity of Sir John French and of his aptitude for his heavy task. Haig would not respond. The forebodings which he had entertained at the outbreak of the war had come near to realization in 1914, but now he felt that the experience which Sir John

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French and his Staff had gained in these later stages had stood them in good stead—and in particular he had full confidence in the capacity of Sir William Robertson, the Chief of Sir John French's Staff. The relationship between the two men had become very close. It could not be described as personal friendship in the ordinary sense of the term. Haig's characteristic aloofness and aloneness in themselves effectively prevented that. But there was great mutual respect and complete confidence and trust each in the other. Their minds moved in parallel lines. Both were highly trained soldiers and their conceptions of the war were similar.

From Robertson, Haig heard of the results of the Commander-in-Chief's discussions with the Cabinet, and it was from the same source that he was kept fully informed of the tendency prevalent at home to commit an ever increasing number of troops to the Dardanelles and of the suggestion to cease active operations in the West, and abandon even the Channel Ports. The very fact that such ideas—totally divergent from the tenets of military strategy and the examples of past history—could be entertained, was to Haig's mind a clear indication that the General Staff at the War Office had entirely ceased to function, and he caustically commented: "The disappearance of the General Staff means that talkers will now control the war."

June and July passed without the troops in the front line being seriously engaged, but they continued to try and establish moral superiority over the enemy opposed to them by a series of small raids.

The divisional and corps staffs were perfecting the preparations for the forthcoming attack.

Every hour of Haig's day was fully occupied, and, as was always his method, he kept as strictly as circumstances would permit to a regular time-table. The breakfast hour never varied from 8.30; and by 9 a.m. Haig was at work at his office table. The reports of the previous day were given to him by his Chief-of-Staff, and immediately he had dealt with them he saw in succession his principal staff officers, with such work as required his decision and orders. He had so complete a

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knowledge of the minutiae of each branch of the work that it was only in exceptional cases that he was unable to give immediate instructions. Very rarely did he retain the document for further perusal and discussion.

Court-martial cases, if serious offences, were always given most careful personal consideration before his signature confirming the sentence was added, and in particular in any court-martial involving the death penalty the account of proceedings was studied from the first word to the last.

By lunch time the office work was disposed of, and after lunch Haig would devote his attention to visiting and inspecting his units, and to pursuing his French studies. Two hours each day was left free for exercise. Although endowed with excellent health and a strong constitution, physical exercise was almost indispensable to him. On the days on which urgent work prevented him from taking his proper measure he was noticeably ill at ease.

The evenings were again devoted to work; normally he dealt with his private correspondence immediately before dinner. He wrote most of these letters with his own hand, for he never became quite expert in dictating to a stenographer.

At dinner he generally received visitors from home, and immediately after the meal he would take the visitors into his own room for half an hour's conversation, and would frequently himself arrange for them the programme of their visits. At this period the visits were all organised through Haig's own personal staff; later when he became Commander-in-Chief this work of arrangement became too heavy to be undertaken by them and was handed over to one of the branches of the General Staff. Two large châteaux were taken over for the visitors, with specially selected officers as conductors; but even then Haig read the list of visitors each day, and chose those whom he wished to see personally.

From these visitors, as well as from General Headquarters, Haig kept himself informed of what was transpiring in London. At this period there reigned in Westminster what Sir Henry Wilson with his apt descriptive faculty has called "The Cabinet of all the indecisions." Though Haig never varied in his respect and admiration for Mr. Asquith, he could not

fail to be disturbed by the information which reached him from every source, and he made no secret of his anxiety about the eventual outcome of the confused policy prevalent in the council chamber at home. The Cabinet Meetings were said to have assumed the character of a debating society, over which the Prime Minister presided with skill and dignity, but from which he was unable to evolve clear-cut decisions. The advice of the responsible technical advisers was studiously disregarded, and plans vying with one another in their impracticability were voiced, and impetuously pressed by their several advocates. There appeared to be no authority to prevent interminable discussions on these questions, and to focus attention on the vital matters connected with the armies in France.

Within two months Haig himself was consulted on such diverse subjects as the advisability of sending the whole of the British Army to the Dardanelles, the abandonment of the Channel Ports, the prospects of an Allied success in Italy, the chances of a landing in Syria, the advantages of a landing in the Baltic and its influence on the German hold on France. One or other of the advocates of these schemes would seek to enlist Haig's support, and to one and all Haig gave the same reply: "Consult your technical and responsible advisers, who are, or should be, possessed of all the facts. Keep fast hold on first principles. Settle on a plan and pursue it with determination. Remember that even a bad decision is better than indecision." He made no secret of his own view that the war must be fought and won in the West; but the responsibility for decision, or even for advice on the strategy, did not rest with him, and he resolutely declined to interfere with the constitutional prerogatives of others.

Nevertheless, when at one time it appeared to be more than a possibility that the bulk—if not indeed the whole—of the British Army was to be withdrawn from France and despatched to distant theatres, he brought the whole weight of his influence to bear against the suggestion, and urged that at all costs the Channel Ports must be maintained as a bridge-head, and that touch must be maintained with the French Army.



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Already Lord Kitchener was consulting Haig about the difficulties which he was experiencing in the Cabinet and also with the Commander-in-Chief. On a visit early in July, Kitchener explained to Haig that the Press campaign, originated by French, had affected his position and influence in the Cabinet; how he had himself refused to permit any counter-campaign in the newspapers, but how he still felt that Sir John French was intriguing against him.

Haig had always most strongly disapproved of French's appeal to the Press; but now he urged upon Lord Kitchener that he should spare no pains to repair the breach that had arisen, in view of the vital necessity for cordial relations between the War Minister and the Commander in the Field, and Lord Kitchener's reply that he was "ready to do anything—even to blacken French's boots—in order to obtain such an agreement," gave him keen pleasure.

Haig took the opportunity afforded by Lord Kitchener's visit to bring the latter more closely in contact with the actual realities of modern warfare. He personally conducted the War Minister to the front-line trenches, and at some length explained to him that it was now possible to arrive at an almost mathematical calculation of the depth to which an attack with a given strength would penetrate in the German line. He emphasized the fact that the war was being rapidly transformed into siege warfare, and that unless immediate and continuous operations were undertaken siege warfare methods might be forced upon the army in the field. The fighting of the future would perforce assume all the characteristics of an attack on a fortress, with its heavy casualties and slow progress. Haig gave it as his definite opinion that under present conditions a force of thirty-six divisions and 1,100 guns—but not less—could make a breach in the German line on a frontage of twenty-five miles.

Lord Kitchener was greatly impressed. The discussions begun in France were continued during a hasty visit paid by Haig to London later in the month, when he was summoned to receive from His Majesty the King the collar of the G.C.B.

Haig's visitors were not, however, confined to men in

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high office. Prominent men from all branches of civil life were included, and were received with the same unfailing courtesy.

Efficiency in any sphere of human endeavour gains respect, and efficiency was the predominant feature of the I Army at this time. It is difficult to estimate the effect that visits from such diverse sources, and the interviews which Haig readily accorded, had on public opinion. One remarkable incident, however, is at least worthy of record. Mr. Ben Tillett, in company with M. Bruhl (a prominent French Socialist), arrived in France early in June. Neither of these men made any secret of his hostility to militarism in every form. Haig gave express orders that every facility was to be given to these visitors to see everything they desired; they were to be allowed free and full opportunity of meeting and talking with men of all ranks throughout the army, and were not to be embarrassed in their conversation with the men by the presence of any officers. Haig himself received the two visitors at the beginning of their tour, and told them of the arrangements he had made; and few things gave Haig more pleasure than to learn that on his return to Britain Mr. Tillett was unswerving in his efforts—both private and public—to assist the cause of the army in the field.

It is an interesting and curious fact that though Haig never unbent, and though he always retained the manner of the "Grand Seigneur," yet he never failed to obtain the respect and admiration even of those whose life work was devoted to the propagation of the principles of social equality. Though he made no parade of his keen sympathy with those of a lower social and military status—and though strict discipline was the bed-rock of his dealings with the Army, though his manner was always reserved, and at times almost cold—yet instinctively all who spoke to him were conscious of the feeling of comradeship that existed between him and the men in the trenches. It was that feeling that made Haig in all his Army orders speak of "All ranks" and never of the customary "Officers and men."

If during those summer months of 1915 there was little activity in the front-line trenches in France, the rivalries

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between the various personalities in the political world in London were almost ceaseless, and a decisive crisis was imminent. Mr. Lloyd George's restless energy and pronounced hostility to Lord Kitchener had succeeded in bringing about the formation of the Munitions Committee—the forerunner of the Ministry of Munitions—with himself as Chairman, to undertake the control of the ammunition supply and to remedy the defect of which the War Office was accused.

Although no one was more conscious than Haig of the difficulties in the field caused by the shortage of ammunition, he would never admit that that shortage was due to any failure at the War Office, either before or during the war. He knew how unprepared Great Britain had been for the war. He knew also that even in France and Germany, where the prospect of war had been ever present in the minds of soldiers and statesmen alike, and where neither care nor money had been spared to make adequate preparation, there also existed a distinct, though less serious, shortage in ammunition supplies. He realized that time was required for the construction of the necessary plant for the production of the materials of war, and he had examined and found no fault with the steps which Lord Kitchener had already taken.

The blame, if any, he ascribed to the policy of financial starvation of the Services pursued by successive Governments in Britain prior to the war, rather than to any defects in military administration. The full utilization of civil resources for the prosecution of the war was in complete accordance with his view, but he would have preferred to see civilian enterprise utilized within and not outside the machinery of the War Office.

Nor was his confidence in the new Committee augmented by the first visit paid by some of its members in August, when, as Haig noted with amusement—not unmixed with anxiety—they showed themselves totally ignorant of the very nature of the material required by the Army. One member even expressed to Haig his astonishment at finding that the Army no longer used the solid cannon-balls of Waterloo days. Once the decision had been made and the new Committee

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was in being, Haig spared no efforts to assist them to a knowledge of their task. No immediate results could be anticipated from any action however energetic. It would take many months before orders given now could produce any acceleration in the supply to the Field Armies, and Haig explained to the visiting members the vital necessity of a careful watch being kept on any modifications which the progress of the war might necessitate, and of the importance of making immediate arrangements for the supply of each innovation as it became known, without the intervention of long delays for discussion and correspondence. In his despatches Haig points out that in actual fact the effect of the activities of the new system were not felt in France until after the Somme Battle at the end of 1916. Before that date the army was still fighting with the ammunition ordered by the War Office under Lord Kitchener's administration.

The introduction of the Stokes Mortar was primarily due to Haig's intervention. The mortar had been submitted to the War Office by the inventor, and had been rejected on technical grounds. General Rimington,\* commanding the Indian Division then in reserve in France, had disagreed with the War Office verdict and had brought the mortar out to France for further trial. Haig, who was on the outlook for some new device, took the opportunity of being present at a demonstration. Although at the time it was imperfect in design and uncertain in action, Haig immediately perceived its potential value, and pressed for a more complete investigation at home. Ultimately the Stokes Mortar proved an invaluable addition to the armament.

Equally important in Haig's opinion was the question of the adequate reinforcements in men. In conversation with Lord Kitchener he had raised the question of conscription, and at his request Lord Kitchener had explained to a conference of the Corps Commanders and Senior Staff Officers of the I Army the reasons which prevented him from pressing for conscription at an earlier date, and which still prompted him to hold his hand. Lord Kitchener pointed out that there were neither arms, ammunition, nor organization to

\* Now Major-General Sir M. F. Rimington, K.C.B., C.B., C.V.O.

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enable the Army to absorb the number of men who would be called out by a full measure of conscription. Voluntary enlistment was gaining the best of the nation in adequate numbers. If conscription was introduced it must be on the continental system of calling up in succession contingents of all men born in a certain year. The army at this period would not absorb more than a very limited number of such yearly contingents. Voluntary enlistment would cease, and the conscripted men would be neither physically nor morally the equals of those at present obtainable under the voluntary system. Thus, in Lord Kitchener's opinion, the problem of conscription must wait until the supply of ammunition and armaments had increased.

Haig totally disagreed, and pressed his view on the Secretary of State for War. He was ready to admit all the difficulties, but to his mind the war had now reached a stage when the French Army could not be expected to expand, or even to maintain its efforts at the pitch of the preceding year. It was now the turn of the British Army to become the determining factor in the war, and if it proved inadequate to cope with the demands upon its strength, then the war might be lost. Ultimately conscription would be inevitable, and he urged strongly that it would be well to introduce it at once to minimize the anomalies that would necessarily occur when conscription had to be enforced and to ensure that the machinery was in existence to enable men to be obtained rapidly to meet any unforeseen contingencies of the war. The essential need of the British Army to insure the performance of its requisite task was man-power.

Haig was confirmed in his opinion by the information now beginning to reach him of the heavy defeats inflicted on the Russians by the Germans. Already it appeared to him improbable that the Russian army could withstand the German pressure much longer.

Haig's emphatic arguments greatly impressed Lord Kitchener; and before he left France the Secretary of State for War told Haig that he now agreed that conscription was necessary from the military point of view, though the political

expediency of the measure must be threshed out in the Cabinet, and he had little hope of the Cabinet's accepting it.

While Haig was dissatisfied with the state of the conscription problem, he was greatly relieved by a definite assurance from Lord Kitchener that he was now a confirmed adherent of the "Western" school of strategy and that he was determined that the principal blow must come from the Western Front and at an early date. Kitchener had indeed expressed himself decidedly and with emphasis: "We must act with all our energy, and do our utmost to help the French, even though by so doing we suffer very heavy losses indeed."

A final visit from Lord Kitchener a few days before the Battle of Loos brought the two great leaders into complete accord. Haig seized the opportunity of explaining in detail to Kitchener the full nature of the forthcoming operations; he pointed out difficulties which he foresaw: the inevitable congestion which would occur as the attack progressed, and the consequent difficulties of bringing forward into the fight fresh troops from the Reserve, which alone could provide the driving power required to carry the attack forward after the first impetus had exhausted itself.

As the two men parted—Kitchener to return to his thankless task in the council chamber, and Haig to conduct the great battle now impending—Haig urged the War Minister to repeat his visit as often as he could. It gave the Army encouragement and himself strength to know that their representative in the Government had first-hand knowledge of all that was going on at the front; and, further, Haig's own task as Commander of an Army was greatly simplified by the information which Kitchener alone could impart to him of the attitude of the civil Government and of the trend of opinion at home.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BATTLE OF LOOS

THE battle for which preparations had been commenced almost immediately after the end of the battle of Festubert, although engaging more British troops than any previous effort, was only a small portion of great concerted operations by which General Joffre hoped to achieve decisive results. In Champagne General de Castelnau was to attack with a great army of twenty-seven divisions. At Arras Foch was to command an army of thirteen divisions which were to attack with the British Army, and in the East the Italian and Serbian Armies were to attack as nearly as possible at the same time. To co-operate in this great combination, Sir John French proposed that the I Army should attack with the II and IV Corps (six divisions) in the front line between the La Bassée Canal and Lens with the crossings of the Haute Deule Canal as the general objective, and with an Army Reserve of three divisions (21st and 24th and Guards Divisions) to exploit any success that might be gained in the first days of the attack. The assault of the British and French troops on their immediate right was to be simultaneous. The date was fixed for the 25th September.

Until this period the harmony which had prevailed between the British leaders in the field had been in marked contrast to the discord and dissension at home. This harmony was now broken by a controversy, which rapidly became acute, between Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig.

The origin of the disagreement lay in the disposition of the reserves for the forthcoming battle at Loos. Past experience made Haig insistent that all available troops should be so

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disposed from the opening of the battle that they could be thrown into the fight without any unnecessary delay, as the varying fortunes of the struggle might require. Sir John French, on the other hand, was reluctant to surrender control of the reserves, through whose agency alone he could personally influence the course of operations, and at the same time meet the somewhat improbable, but not impossible, contingency of a counter-stroke by the Germans against some other portion of the British front.

Throughout the preliminary conference Haig constantly emphasized his opinion that the whole issue of the battle would be jeopardized, if sufficient strength—by which he meant every available unit—was not at his direct disposal. His plan had been based on the assumption that the whole force would be near at hand, and any alterations at the eleventh hour would involve the risk of disorganizing his attack—and for this he was not prepared to accept the responsibility. At the conclusion of the conference, Haig believed that French had fallen in with his representations.

This belief was confirmed when on August 7th he received a definite communication from the Commander-in-Chief stating that the troops available for the operations (of Loos) would be those of the I Army plus the cavalry corps, and two divisions held in general reserve.

Haig was entirely unaware of all the mental reservations which were to influence the Commander-in-Chief's actions, and bearing in mind the terms of this letter and Lord Kitchener's clearly expressed instructions, to "act with all energy, even though by so doing we suffer very heavy losses indeed," he disposed the whole of the I and IV Corps in the front line for the first assault, relying on the vital and essential support of the General Reserve to carry the attack forward when the first impetus of his own two Corps was exhausted. At the time he had no misgivings or suspicions of the Commander-in-Chief's intention to hold back the troops promised to him; but it would appear that some inkling of Sir John French's plans must have filtered through to French General Headquarters, since on September 12th Joffre uttered a warning against the policy of keeping the reserves too far



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back, with the risk of their "arriving too late to exploit the success of the leading ones. It is indispensable," he ended, "that these divisions are put *before the attack* at the entire disposition of General Haig."

On September 18th, for the first time, Haig was informed of the Commander-in-Chief's intention, and Joffre's fears were realized. The Commander-in-Chief definitely decided to keep the whole of the General Reserve near Lillers. Haig's experiences at Neuve Chapelle and Festubert had not been lost upon him, and he quickly appreciated the dangers of such a decision. The previous battles had illustrated the speed with which attacking troops are exhausted and fresh forces are required to carry forward the attack; and had also convinced him of the necessity of taking instant advantage of success before the situation could be retrieved by the enemy.

At once he renewed his earnest representations to the Commander-in-Chief. In a letter of September 19th, he drew attention to the fact that the whole of the disposable troops of the I Army were being employed in the attack of 25th September, and that there were no army reserves. The whole plan of operations of the I Army was based on the assumption that the troops of the General Reserve would be close at hand, and it was essential that the heads of the two leading divisions of the XI Corps (the general reserve) should be on the line Noeux-les-Mines—Beuvry by daybreak on the 25th September. If the troops remained in the Lillers district until the 24th, then to be in the position where Haig required them at daybreak on the 25th, they would have to undergo an exhausting night march before the battle. Accordingly Haig urged that the troops should be moved forward on the 23rd, and placed at his disposal, so that they might have one night of complete rest, and be available to give the support necessary to carry forward a successful attack. Opportunities for exploiting success were transitory, and once lost did not readily recur.

Sir John French was now faced with a clear alternative. He might definitely decline Haig's request and tell him to fight the battle independent of all considerations of the General Reserve, or he might whole-heartedly accept Haig's

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request, reinforced as it was by the advice both of General Joffre and General Foch, and place some or all of the General Reserve at Haig's disposal, and then await the issue. He did neither. He told the General Officer Commanding the General Reserve that his troops remained under General Headquarters and were not to take orders from Haig until formally transferred; and he told Haig that the Reserve would be available for him when required. Eventually he issued orders to the Reserve to move from their concentration area at 7 p.m. on the night of the 24th, in the hope that they would by midnight reach a position whence they could be thrown into battle and get a night's rest before the battle broke. Even this hope was not fulfilled. The congestion of the roads—inevitable in the area immediately in rear of a battlefield—unfavourable weather conditions, and inferior march discipline (due to inexperienced troops with unaccustomed transport) impeded the march. The ill-omened divisions arrived exhausted and dispirited in their billeting area only a few hours before the outbreak of the bombardment—the heaviest the war had yet seen—at 4 a.m. on the 25th.

They were still some seven miles from the point where they would be required, and after a short rest they resumed their march forward.

The question of the Reserves, though the main, was not Haig's only preoccupation. The British were for the first time making use of cloud poison gas. Much was hoped from this new implement of destruction; but its efficacy and even its use depended solely upon the direction and the strength of the wind. If the wind failed altogether, the gas would hang over our own trenches; if it backed, it would send the cloud of gas over the congested area in their rear.

Mr. Gold, one of the senior officials of the Meteorological Department in London, had been placed at Haig's disposal, and was now at I Army Headquarters, attached to the Intelligence Service. Just before midnight the wind, hitherto favourable, had fallen, and there had even been a few gentle breezes blowing from the enemy's trenches. At midnight there was not a breath of wind, and Mr. Gold and the Intelligence Service were receiving with the deepest anxiety during

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these last hours the reports from instruments erected at various points throughout the whole area.

Haig himself slept untroubled, but at 2 a.m., when according to the plan of battle the decision was to be made, he was awakened to be given the disquieting news that the weather reports from all parts of the area were unfavourable. Mr. Gold, with the information at his disposal from distant meteorological stations far beyond the battlefield, still predicted that just before sunrise a breeze would spring up from the right direction, and would last for a few hours. Staff Officers were waiting to convey to the troops the final orders whether or not the gas was to be discharged. Haig ordered the decision to be postponed and went to sleep again. For two more hours there were still no signs of the promised wind. At 4 a.m. Haig, with Colonel Fletcher, his Staff Officer, went to the meteorological station to make the definite pronouncement. Gold was still confident, but there was nothing in the reports from the immediate area that appeared to justify his forecast, and Haig deferred the decision to the last moment.

It was a strange scene of war. The small hut, which was the meteorological headquarters; the darkness of the night only broken by the distant flashes of the guns; Gold busy with his calculations of that most incalculable of all factors in warfare—the weather; the Staff Officers eager and anxious, and Haig himself silent and motionless, save that from time to time he looked at his watch, and counted the minutes that remained before the decision must be made.

Each report was given to him as it arrived from the distant meteorological stations, and until 5 a.m. none was favourable.

The decision was fateful. If the wind proved unfavourable, and the gas was discharged, it would be an added peril to our own troops, and there could be small possibility of their success. If favourable, and the gas was withheld, its absence would cost many lives, and might prejudice the result of the whole operation.

At 5.15 a single report from a single station noted a slight breath of wind in the right direction, and just at the same time the smoke from the cigarette in Colonel Fletcher's hand was seen to move slowly but surely towards the enemy's lines.

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In one short incisive sentence Haig gave the order that the gas was to be discharged, and walked slowly away to his own quarters.

Even before the order could reach the troops all Gold's hopes were fulfilled: the wind increased and blew steadily in moderate strength in the right direction, and under cover of the gas immediate success attended the first stages of the attack. Two hours later reports began to arrive stating that the whole of the first-line German trenches were in our hands, and Haig anxiously awaited the transfer of the control of the General Reserve, which even at this moment he might have pushed forward with success.

At 8.45 a Staff Officer came from the Commander-in-Chief to convey Sir John French's warmest congratulations on the success which had been reported, but Haig wanted troops and not congratulations, and the Staff Officer was despatched back forthwith to the Commander-in-Chief to tell him that all the I Army troops were now engaged, and to beg him to place the reserve divisions at Haig's disposal at once. No answer was received, and it was not until 11.30 a.m. that the Commander-in-Chief himself arrived, and, after some discussion with Haig, said that he would personally go and tell the officer commanding the reserve troops to place two divisions, the 21st and 24th, at Haig's disposal. The Guards Division, incomparably the best of the reserve troops, was still retained. In bitter impatience Haig now watched the minutes passing—minutes which he well knew from his past experience were marking the critical moments of the battle.

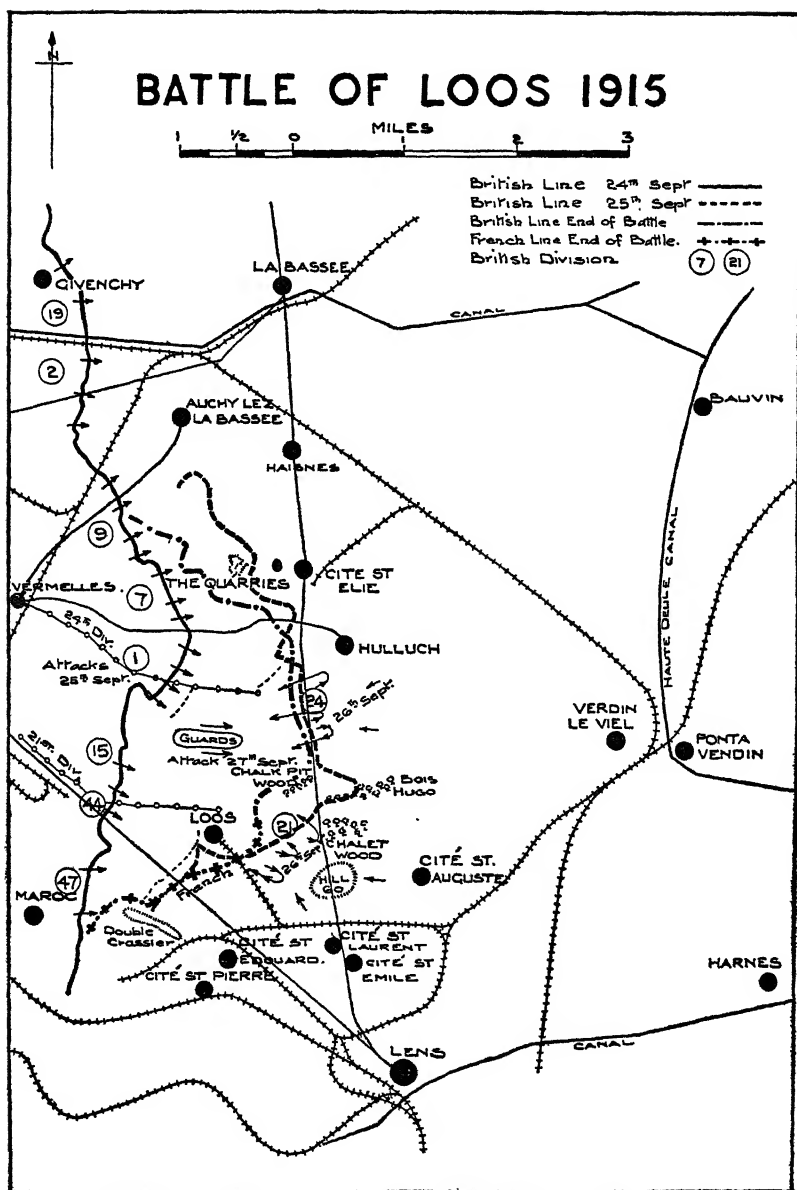
The assaulting troops had swept over the German defences, but the resistance was stiffening. Loos had been reached, part of Hulluch had fallen, a large number of prisoners had been captured, but inevitably the impetus of the attack was dying down. The French on the right had not attacked until after midday and had made little or no progress: the Germans could concentrate all their local effort against the British. Nothing but fresh troops could carry the wave of the attack forward. It was not until 2 p.m. that Haig received definite information that the reserve divisions, who alone could supply these new troops, were under his orders.

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Even then they were still far distant from the fighting line, struggling forward through the congested battle area, exhausted, destitute of supplies and dispirited. The afternoon wore on. Conflicting news arrived from the front. The advance was held up. Already there were the ominous signs of an impending counter-attack. The possibility of a great success became, as each hour passed, more remote. By nightfall some 8,000 yards of German trench line were in our hands, 2,500 prisoners had been captured, Loos was still firmly held and part of Hulluch was reported in British hands, but the reserve divisions were only now reaching the front line. The fleeting opportunity which, if taken, might have turned success into victory had passed. But there was still some room for hope.

A renewal of the attack on the following day, employing the two extra divisions, might carry the line forward for some distance farther and forestall the expected German counter-attack. The two ill-fated reserve divisions, already exhausted by their night march on the 24th, and further tried by a long and wearing march through the battle area on the 25th, were thrown into the battle on the 26th. But instead of a disorganized and defeated enemy, they found themselves confronted by a reorganized German line, and with German troops heartened by the British delay in the exploitation of their early success. The two new divisions, although composed of some of the best of the manhood of Great Britain, forming as they did part of Kitchener's First Hundred Thousand, and although they numbered in their ranks many trained officers, were in no condition to meet for the first time the full stress and strain of battle. By midday news began to reach Haig that not only had the attack failed, but that the divisions had been driven back beyond the point from which they had started. Haig at once resolved to go forward himself to take personal control of the situation, but just before he left his Headquarters even worse news reached him. The whole of the infantry of the two divisions, ran the report, had abandoned their guns and were retiring in the utmost confusion and disorder. Haig at first doubted the truth of this report, and gave immediate instructions that

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should it prove incorrect the author was to be tried by court-martial: unfortunately the truth of the message was circumstantially confirmed. The day's attack had been totally unsuccessful, and by nightfall much of the ground gained in the initial attack had been retaken by the Germans. It was impossible even for Haig to avoid the note of bitterness in the face of this disappointment: "If there had been," he said, "even one division in reserve close up we could have walked right through. General Headquarters refuses to recognize the teaching of the war as regards the control of reserves."

As soon as the fighting ceased, the dissension between Sir John French and Haig over the preliminary arrangements of the battle broke out anew. It was the custom for Army Commanders to submit to General Headquarters a weekly report of the operations of the forces under their command; and on October 3rd Haig forwarded to General Headquarters the report on his Army for the week covering the Battle of Loos. In it he referred to the fact that the leading troops of the brigade, being unsupported by adequate reserves immediately at hand, and after suffering heavy casualties, were later in the day either driven out of the village or killed or captured. In a subsequent paragraph he recorded that, at 1 p.m. the General Officer Commanding IV Corps appealed to Army Headquarters for reserve troops to be pushed up at once, but none were near enough to be of use.

Sir John French realized that these phrases implied a criticism of his own preliminary preparations, and at once demanded an explanation from Haig, implying that Haig himself was responsible for the delay in the employment of the 21st and 24th divisions. The letter from General Headquarters went even further and contained a veiled slight upon Haig's strategical judgment. The I Army letter was held to imply that reserves should have been immediately pushed through such gaps as the 15th Division had made. The Commander-in-Chief in his reply committed himself to the opinion that the futility of pushing reserves through a narrow gap had been demonstrated by what had happened in Champagne on the same day.

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Again a few days later Haig was rebuked for his failure to take into account the time that must elapse before the reserves would be prepared for action and before the Commander-in-Chief could entrust them to the command of the I Army. The Commander-in-Chief definitely stated that in his view the I Army's plan of attack should have taken these facts into consideration, and that sufficient reserves should have been kept in hand to secure important localities gained and to support the advanced troops pending the arrival of the General Reserve. Haig was further informed that his replies to the various points raised by General Headquarters would be attached to his weekly report and forwarded with comments to a higher authority, and the letter concluded with a definite order: "The Commander-in-Chief directs that there shall be no further argument or correspondence on a subject which is hereby finally closed."

Although all these letters from General Headquarters bore the signature of the Chief of the General Staff, it was clear that they represented a grave disagreement between Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig. For some weeks the question was allowed to rest so far as official correspondence was concerned, but the constant stream of visitors to General Headquarters and I Army Headquarters was quick to realize that relations between the two men were strained, and it rapidly became known in official circles in London that harmony had ceased to exist in the military hierarchy in France.

Sir John French's despatch covering the Battle of Loos was published in *The Times* of 2nd November, and in it Haig first read the Commander-in-Chief's official statement of his views. The Commander-in-Chief had written in the despatch:

"At 9.30 a.m. I placed the 21st and 24th Divisions at the disposal of the General Officer Commanding I Army, who at once ordered the General Officer Commanding XI Corps to move up in support of the attacking troops."

And:

"At 6 p.m. the Guards Division arrived at Noeux-les-Mines, and on the morning of 26th I placed them



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at the disposal of the General Officer Commanding I Army."

Haig at once took exception to these two paragraphs, which he considered definite misstatements of facts, and in a short official letter, dated 4th November, he asked the Commander-in-Chief to make the necessary corrections. He pointed out that the 21st and 24th Divisions were not placed under his orders at the time stated, nor had he himself issued any orders to the General Officer Commanding the XI Corps, as the latter was not at this time under his command ; further, the Guards Division was not placed under his orders on September 26th, but only by a message received at 4.15 in the afternoon.

Sir John French replied to these objections that the extracts from the recent despatch appeared to be correct for all practical purposes, and that therefore he saw no reason for amending them. Haig was not prepared to let the matter rest there, and in a further note to General Headquarters on the following day (9th November), he pointed out that the wording in the paragraph to which he took exception implied that the 21st and 24th Divisions had been at his disposal for use in support of the attacking troops, and that the Guards Division had been available throughout the whole of the 26th.

The issue was no longer a matter of opinion but of fact, and Haig, who had kept careful notes of the conversation with the Commander-in-Chief and of all the messages which he had received and issued, made a formal request that the actual facts should be placed on record. He was at pains to make his point clear. There was no dispute about certain facts. The distance of the head of the General Reserve from the front line of British trenches was five miles. The Commander-in-Chief was at Lillers and his Staff at St. Omer. A General Reserve, if it was to be usefully and promptly used, must be centrally situated ; if it was to be utilized to confirm any success, control must be vested in the hands of a Commander with his finger on the pulse of the battle. The sole person who could manipulate the reserves destined to exploit a success south of the La Bassée Canal must therefore

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be the Commander of the I Army. It was obviously impossible to communicate in time with a distant General Headquarters, especially when there was no direct telephone communication between Army Headquarters and General Headquarters. This total misconception of the fundamental principles of the use of reserves in battle had had its inevitable results. The reserves did not actually march until 11.15 a.m. They were not at that time under the orders of the I Army, and their leading troops were seven miles distant from the place where they were required.

The statement in the despatch that the 21st and 24th Divisions had been placed at the disposal of the General Officer Commanding the I Army by 9.30 a.m., and that he had at once ordered the General Officer Commanding XI Corps to move them up in support of the attacking troops was incorrect and gave an entirely false view of the true position. There was documentary evidence to show that at that time neither the 21st nor the 24th Divisions nor the XI Corps were placed under the I Army, so that no orders could have been issued to the commanders at the time stated. The past experiences of Neuve Chapelle and Festubert had shown conclusively that unless the reserves could be brought on to the battlefield within three hours they would be too late to be of practical service, and that if the enemy were allowed to man their rearward defences after being driven back, it would be too late to take advantage of the first onrush. If the Germans were given time to reconstitute their line it would be necessary to start afresh with the redistribution of artillery, and re-registration, and all the other lengthy preparations. The reserve divisions were in actual fact marching past the Commander-in-Chief at a distance of from five to seven miles from the battlefield five hours after the successful assault had been launched.

It was obvious that relations between Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig were now not only strained, but irreconcilable. All the doubts which had oppressed Haig on the outbreak of war as to Sir John French's competence for the responsibilities of his office, which had not been lightened during the periods of fighting at the First Battle of Ypres,

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returned to his mind with overwhelming force. He was now convinced that, whatever might be French's capacity for the conduct of operations of a relatively small force, the size of the British Armies and the importance of their operations were now such that it was impossible to expect that French would prove adequate for the demands which would be made on the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces.

Nor was he satisfied that the conduct of the war at home was in safe hands. There was still no sign that military views were being adequately considered by the Cabinet, with whom the final decision inevitably lay. The year had shown military effort squandered. There had been fierce fighting in the various theatres, but little concentrated effort. The General Staff in London was still to all intents and purposes in abeyance. No single man—not even Lord Kitchener—could unaided control the gigantic military organization of the Empire in Arms.

Loyalty, both to those he served and to those who served under him, was the very essence of Haig's character, and he was now torn by a conflict between loyalty to his Chief and the conviction that the whole fate of the Empire was at stake. Nothing but a change both in system and in personnel could, in his judgment, prevent a repetition of the failures and errors of Loos: yet he could not lend himself to anything in the nature of an intrigue against his immediate superior.

Lord Kitchener had asked to be kept informed of every important matter on the I Army front, and Haig despatched to the Secretary of State for War a bald record of the facts of Loos, telling him of the non-arrival of the reserves, and of the official correspondence which had passed.

To Lord Haldane, who visited General Headquarters a few days later, he repeated the account, and added that in his opinion the battle had failed to attain complete success for four reasons:

1. The failure to realize the necessity of having the reserves close up to the firing line.

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2. The fact that the reserve divisions were billeted in depth, and no attempt was made to concentrate them.

3. The inadequacy of the rationing arrangements of the two divisions which were hurried forward to meet the critical situation.

4. The unsuitability of the divisions selected to act as general reserve; although excellent material they were inexperienced in war: they should have been put to other work so as to relieve seasoned troops to do the actual fighting.

It was soon brought to his knowledge that the events at Loos must result in a change in the Command in France, and that the choice of a successor must lie between himself and Robertson. Although senior in rank to Robertson, Haig at once offered to serve under him should Robertson be offered the appointment; but his own opinion was that Robertson could best serve the cause as Chief of the Imperial General Staff at home, and he took every opportunity of emphasizing this view. What was required in London was a soldier of strong character and sound military views. Robertson, in his opinion, had both these qualities. As Chief of the General Staff, Robertson would not only be able to keep the Government from unnecessary blunders, but would also be in a position to give the French that guidance and advice which their peculiar tendency to alternate waves of optimism and pessimism made so necessary. Haig knew that the Germans were already feeling the strain of the war in men, material and money; and he believed that victory was assured if plans were carefully made, and the war pursued with method and determination. But there was no time to lose. Every false step brought increased risk; the immediate requirement was that the lessons of the Battle of Loos should be appreciated and prompt steps taken to prevent their recurrence.

To Lord Esher, another visitor to France, Haig again recommended that Robertson should be appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff to advise the War Cabinet direct, and not through the Secretary of State for War.

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To the objection that it would mean a dangerous interference with Lord Kitchener's position and duties, Haig rejoined that Lord Kitchener should either be left in his present position at the War Office to carry out all the administrative arrangements of the war, but bereft of power to interfere with Robertson's prerogative of general military policy, or else he should be appointed Viceroy of India. He would not countenance the suggestion that Lord Kitchener might be usefully employed either in the Mediterranean or in Egypt. Wherever Lord Kitchener was, his commanding personality would give that field of operations a wrong perspective in the strategical picture.

A few days later Haig was himself ordered home, and again seized the opportunity of laying his views before the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law. He declared that the time had come when an Imperial General Staff should be organized, independent of the War Office administration.

All distinctions between Regulars, Territorials and Kitchener's Army must be abolished, and a homogeneous army should be created in their stead, with units in the field maintained at full war strength; and with a single establishment for all divisions. Haig was not impressed by Mr. Bonar Law's personality. He remarked that he thought him an honest feeble man, who had failed to realize the urgent necessity for immediate and energetic action. To Mr. Bonar Law, and indeed to all the Ministers whom he had met, the situation in the Balkans and Egypt seemed so full of terrors that they could not look beyond them.

Next day Haig received private information telling him definitely that Sir John French was to be recalled from France, and that he himself was to succeed. Haig's power of detachment enabled him to continue to enjoy his few days of leave undisturbed by the great change impending in his career. Few documents were forwarded to him from France, where indeed things were singularly quiet on the battle front. Nor did Haig give any indication even to his own Staff at

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I Army Headquarters of the changes that were now imminent. Both at General Headquarters and at I Army Headquarters speculation was however rife. Rumours filtered through from officers returning from leave, and even the strict censorship of war time could not wholly prevent anticipatory paragraphs in the press.

On December 1st, Lord Kitchener at the War Office confirmed the news of Sir John French's resignation, and consulted Haig on a variety of military problems, but he made no mention of French's successor; and Haig did not introduce the subject, though the question must have been uppermost in the minds of both men. Not until two days later did Lord Kitchener tell Haig that he was summoning Robertson back to London as Chief of the Imperial General Staff at the War Office, and that he had written to the Prime Minister recommending Haig as Sir John French's successor. Kitchener added the comforting assurance that Haig need not have any worries beyond those concerned with the command of the forces in the field. He could rely implicitly on the Secretary of State's whole-hearted support at home.

Another week passed before Haig—once again at his headquarters in France—received an official letter from the Prime Minister saying that he now had the pleasure of proposing to Haig—subject to His Majesty's approval—that he should succeed to the Command in France.

The promotion of Haig and Robertson involved many other changes in important commands. Sir Charles Monro succeeded Haig in command of the I Army. Neither Haig nor Robertson had sufficient confidence in Wilson to offer him a high staff appointment, and at one time Wilson expressed his intention of going on half-pay, but Haig intervened to prevent this course. The war was being fought on a gigantic scale, he declared, and there was work for every senior soldier. He was fully aware that Wilson had been belittling both Haig himself and other British Generals, and that an article in the *Observer* suggesting that the British Army should be placed under French leadership was attributed to Wilson.

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Ultimately General Wilson was given the command of the IV Corps holding the line on the Vimy Ridge.\*

All the heads of the sections of the I Army General Staff accompanied Haig to General Headquarters. He had desired that the high appointment of Chief of Staff should be filled by his own I Army Chief of Staff, General Butler; Butler was considered too junior for the appointment, and Haig had thereupon asked for General Kiggell,† an old and tried friend of War Office days, who had not hitherto seen service in France. General Butler became Deputy-Chief under General Kiggell, in succession to General Wilson.

On December 17th the formal change between Haig and French took place, and Haig assumed the chief command in France, with his Headquarters at St. Omer.

The last few days of the year were spent by Haig and his Staff in the formal work of taking over charge. He visited in succession all the Army Headquarters of his Command, and also French Headquarters.

On New Year's Eve he gave a dinner to the heads of departments at General Headquarters, entertaining both those who had come with him from the I Army, and those whom his predecessor had left behind. There was no formality and there were no speeches, but the dinner marked the beginning of a brotherhood of officers, all united in a common admiration and trust in the new Commander-in-Chief, and all supremely confident that under his direction the Army in France would be successful in the stupendous task which had been imposed upon it.

\* By a curious coincidence Sir H. Wilson found himself in command of a corps opposed to the XIX German Corps under General von Freytag Loringhoven, whose military career had been strangely like his own. Von Freytag Loringhoven had begun the war as chief of the German Mission with Austrian Headquarters. From this appointment he had become sub-chief of the German General Staff under Falkenhayn. Now a new vacancy of a Corps Commander gave him an opportunity of active service with troops for a few weeks. He was determined to take advantage of this brief period by an operation of arms, and ordered an attack on the British lines which gained some measure of success, and captured a few hundred yards of very important front-line trenches.

† Lieutenant-General Sir L. E. Kiggell, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

## CHAPTER XII

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IF ambition had been Haig's aim he had now achieved it in full measure; but, although ambition had played a large part in Haig's earlier life, in the face of the tremendous issues at stake his keen sense of relative values had long since made personal ambition tawdry in his eyes. He was fully conscious of, but in no way depressed by, the magnitude of the task which confronted him. He was aware that he had the complete confidence and support of the Ministry at home, of the public, and—even more important—of the army under his command. He was genuinely convinced that the position to which he had now been called was one which he, and he alone in the British Army, could fill. It was not conceit; there was no man who was less inclined to over-estimate his own value or capacity.\*

It was a considered opinion based upon a dispassionate consideration of all the factors that he could discern. He came to regard himself with almost Calvinistic faith as the predestined instrument of Providence for the achievement of victory for the British Armies. His abundant self-reliance was reinforced by this conception of himself as the child of destiny.

\* In a letter to Mr. Winston Churchill, written in the last year of his life, Haig said: "No one knows as well as I do how far short of the ideal my own conduct both of the I Corps and I Army was, as well as of the British Expeditionary Force when Commander-in-Chief. But I do take credit for this, that it was owing to the decisions which I took in August and September, 1918, that the war ended in November and thereby, to say the least, saved the country many millions of money."—*Nash's Magazine*, November, 1928.



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Many of those who saw him seldom, struck by his calm demeanour in the face of difficulties, have spoken of him as phlegmatic ; but by nature and instinct he was neither sluggish nor impervious to the sense of excitement. His calmness arose from his faith in the ultimate success of himself and of his armies, and from the rigid control and repression he exercised upon his emotions, lest any undue sign of excitement might weaken the confidence of those about him. Nor did his self-confidence and his belief in his destiny ever lead him to neglect the study of each factor of the problems which confronted him. They gave him strength, but they did not ease the burden.

Although fully acquainted with most of the elements of the situation when he took over command, his innate caution and thoroughness impelled him to examine it anew, as if the problem were facing him for the first time, and he ordered his Staff to prepare for him forthwith a complete review of the situation.

Lord Kitchener's instructions both to French and himself had clearly defined his task. He was "To support and co-operate with the French and Belgian Armies against our common enemies. . . . To assist the French and Belgian Governments in driving the German Armies from French and Belgian territory, and eventually to restore the neutrality of Belgium." Kitchener continued his instructions with the words : "The defeat of the enemy by the combined Allied Armies must always be regarded as the primary object . . . to achieve that end, the closest co-operation of French and British as a united Army must be the governing policy ; but I wish you to distinctly understand that your command is an independent one, and that you will in no case come under the orders of any Allied General further than the necessary co-operation with our Allies, above referred to." Lord Kitchener closed with the reassuring promise of "the whole-hearted and unswerving support of the Government, of myself and of your compatriots."

The possibility of withdrawal did not escape Lord Kitchener's attention, and, long after the North Sea had claimed him as its victim, the emergency which he had

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foreseen was to arise, and to lead to the establishment of the unified command. "If unforeseen circumstances should arise such as to compel our Expeditionary Force to retire," he wrote, "such a retreat should never be contemplated as an independent move to secure the defence of the ports forming the Straits of Dover—although their security is a matter of great importance demanding that every effort should be made to prevent the lines which the Allied Forces now hold in Flanders being broken by the enemy. The safety of the Channel will be decided by the overthrow of the German Army rather than by the occupation by our troops of some defensive position with their backs to the sea. . . . Notwithstanding the above, our Expeditionary Force may be compelled to fall back upon the Channel Ports, or the circumstances be such that it will be strategically advantageous that, while co-operating with the French Army, it should carry out such a retirement. The requisite steps required to meet this contingency should therefore receive due consideration."\*

Kitchener was no stylist, but his purport was unmistakably clear, and so far as this message reflected the mind of the Home Government Haig had no cause for anxiety ; but the problem which he had to solve had many features which were much less satisfactory. He had to combine independence in his Command with co-operation with the French Army and its Commanders. He had to form his own judgment (with the responsibility for the welfare of his own troops and the fate of the nation dependent upon his decision), and yet he had to co-operate with, and might possibly even have to conform to, the strategy of the French leaders, in cases where it conflicted with his own judgment.

He was not called upon to decide or even to offer an official opinion on the problem of the rival merits of the Eastern theatre of war and the battlefield of France and Belgium, which was now the subject of bitter controversy in London and Paris. Yet that problem was fundamental to the conduct of the war. It was impossible for a man of

\* "Sir Douglas Haig's Command," Dewar and Boraston (Vol. I., p. 62).

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Haig's sincerity to demand the development of the full resources of the Empire and their concentration in France and Belgium without being primarily convinced that there, and there alone, could the war be won. Nor would his independence of mind allow him to accept the decision of others on so vital an issue. Even when in command of the I Army he had been consulted unofficially by statesmen on the subject, and he knew that now in Chief Command he must expect a repetition of these unofficial deliberations.

He set himself to review the problem, and he arrived at the considered judgment that in the West, and in the West only, should final victory be sought.

The Central Powers depended upon Germany for final victory. So long as Germany was unbeaten her Allies would help her to the limits of their endurance, and even if each of those Allies were successively crushed, Germany herself, undefeated and unshaken, and indeed strengthened in organization and man-power by the respite afforded to her, would in the end confront the Allies, weakened and exhausted by their efforts in other theatres.

Alternatively the expenditure of time and resources necessary to achieve the overthrow of even the least of Germany's Allies in a distant theatre might well afford to Germany the opportunity for a crushing blow either against Russia or against France and Britain. The Dardanelles Expedition, using mainly naval forces with only a small number of troops, might in 1915 have rapidly achieved important strategic results without unduly hampering the operations in the main theatre, but the Dardanelles had already been abandoned, and Haig, in common with all trained strategists on the Allied side, could only regard with dismay any proposal to divert the main effort of Great Britain for the ensuing year from France and Belgium to Mesopotamia, to the Egyptian frontier or to Salonika.

To a lesser extent the same arguments applied to the Austro-Italian Front, and to the Austro-Russian Front. Any great Russian success against Austria would indeed ultimately react upon Germany, and strong pressure by the Italians against the Austrians might in turn weaken the

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Austrian power of resistance against the Russian onslaught. These results, however, would at best be indirect and relatively slow. Troops and stores once committed to these places could not readily be recalled. The difficulties of transportation made it practically impossible to move either men or material to distant theatres without the active intelligence sources of the enemy getting timely information of the movement, and, once known to them, the Germans would with infinitely less effort and in ample time take steps to meet any serious threat against the integrity of their defences. It was only an example of the classic strategical problem of "interior lines." While therefore it might be justifiable to transfer supplies of military stores to enable the Russians and Italians to exercise their utmost pressure on the Austrians, there could be no question but that the transfer of British troops to either of these distant theatres would be a grave strategical error. It was on these considerations that Haig formed the decided opinion that the correct policy for the Allies was to utilize the whole power of the British Empire on the Western Front, with the exception of such stores as would serve to keep alive the Russian and Italian efforts, and the troops required to conduct an active defence in the more distant spheres. With due concentration of effort on the Western Front, with full co-operation between the Allied Commanders, and a carefully thought-out and energetically executed plan of campaign, the resistance of Germany might reasonably be overcome before the lapse of twelve months. Immediately the German nation became convinced that ultimate defeat was inevitable, the subsequent collapse would be a matter of a few months at most.

Although Haig never had even a shadow of doubt as to the soundness of the view which he had formed thus early yet it was a source of satisfaction to him to have it confirmed in later years. "Defeats of Bulgarians and Turks in Mesopotamia, on the Egyptian Frontier and in Greece," said Haig at the time, "cannot seriously shake Germany's position or even her influence over her Allies, so long as she shows herself able to hold her own on the main front. If

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Germany wins in the end, her Allies will win with her : if Germany is beaten, they are lost." Haig's great military opponent, Ludendorff, gave striking confirmation to Haig's view when he wrote, after the war was over : "Salonika was always a side-show, and must be regarded as such." But it was necessary to wait until peace was signed for this vindication of Haig's policy.

The subsequent course of the war was to show that the great Allied force maintained in Macedonia, imposing all through these critical years a heavy drain both on the land and sea resources of Great Britain, actually accomplished nothing until the failure of the great German offensive in 1918 rendered her ultimate defeat not only inevitable but obvious. Then, and then only, did the Bulgarians sue for peace. At no time during the whole period of the operations in Mesopotamia, the Dardanelles and Salonika did the Allies draw from the main theatre hostile forces of equal strength to their own. There was not at this time any proposal for extensive offensive operations in Palestine. Lord Kitchener was indeed anxious lest the Turks should be able to launch a successful offensive against the Suez Canal, but it was not until many months had passed that any suggestion to detail troops from the Western theatre for an advance through the Holy Land was made.

In these views Haig found himself in complete accord with Sir William Robertson, now responsible for military advice to the Cabinet in London. With a clear idea of the major problem, Haig could address himself to the work which immediately concerned him—the operations of the Allies in France and Belgium during 1916. He reviewed and summarized the position. The divisions under his command, though small in number, were already tried in war, and he had complete confidence in their military efficiency. The supply of guns and ammunition, while not yet fully satisfactory, was rapidly improving. The Ministry of Munitions had not indeed commenced deliveries, but it was at last becoming productive. Compulsory Service had been accepted though not rigidly enforced, and there was every reason to hope that the British Army would

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soon comprise the million men which Haig had indicated as its requisite strength early in August, 1914, and that the existing divisions would be maintained at full war complement.

But the British Army, even thus expanded, would only form one half of the Allied force. Much must depend upon the military efficiency of his immediate Allies—the French and the Belgians—and although Haig was aware that the strain which had been thrown on the French during 1914 and 1915 had had its effect both upon the man-power and upon the fighting spirit of the troops, yet he knew that the moral of the nation was still high, and that the Army would respond to a further call.

Thus it was not the French Army and nation which Haig mistrusted : he believed that they would rise to the occasion. But he was not equally convinced of the military capacity of the leaders in the field. Haig did not share the belief held by some of our soldiers and many prominent civilians in the infallibility of French military leadership. He could not forget that French leadership had been at fault in the initial appreciation of the situation in August, 1914 ; that a French general had inspired the Salonika Expedition in the face of convinced opposition and advice from all the British military authorities.

It was this lack of confidence in French military ability and judgment quite as much as his sense of the duty entrusted to him by Lord Kitchener on behalf of the nation that prompted him—before conferring with Joffre—to investigate the circumstances and decide upon the course which he would himself have adopted had he been in command of the whole of the Allied force.

Although there were ominous warnings already coming from Russia, and especially from the British military attaché with the Russian Army, yet the allied diplomatic representatives in St. Petersburg were confident that Russia still possessed the determination and ability to continue the war. So long as Russia remained even a passive opponent of Germany, the Allies could bring a substantial preponderance to bear against Germany on the Franco-Belgian front, and this

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preponderance would increase as the British strength developed during the year.

An immediate problem was whether the Anglo-French force should embark on a vigorous offensive as soon as weather conditions permitted and the necessary preparations could be completed, or should postpone this offensive until the later months of the year when the strength of the British Army would be greatly enhanced.

The question was a vital one. No less an authority than Lord Kitchener had expressed extreme anxiety about the outcome of the fighting of 1916. He had stated that he regarded this year "as critical as regards the future conduct of the war. . . . Unless we can impose a peace by force of arms during 1916," he had declared, "we shall run a terrible risk of an unsatisfactory stalemate peace, which will necessitate another war in about five years' time, when we shall have few allies and be unprepared." He had also expressed doubts as to whether France could endure, or would have the will to endure, another winter's campaign, if success were not achieved during 1916.

A premature Allied attack ending in failure would prejudice the general position—particularly the uncertain factor of French national stamina. The German moral was high. Germany had not been invaded; apart from the casualties of her fighting troops she had suffered none of the horrors of war. The reports of the results of the blockade which were beginning to come in were conflicting and unsatisfactory, and the German submarine campaign might easily reduce—if indeed it did not destroy—the efficiency of the blockade.

The German line in France and Belgium now resembled an enormous fortress. The French armies had borne the brunt of the previous years' fighting, and had sustained heavy casualties. In any future allied offensive, Great Britain would have to take a much larger share, and we were still far short of the guns and ammunition essential for success in the assault on this fortress.

On July 13th, 1916, Mr. Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, told the representatives of the Allied Powers

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assembled in London that : " When we last met, the Russian armies were facing a hailstorm of iron with flesh and blood. The British troops were condemned to an enforced inactivity because our munitions were not equal to a sustained attack. We had to create out of next to nothing arsenals to provide munitions for the huge army now in the field. Hundreds of thousands of men and women, hitherto unaccustomed to metal and chemical work, have been trained for munition making. Our heavy guns are rolling in at a great rate, and, as for ammunition, we are turning out nearly twice as much ammunition in a single week as we fired in the great offensive in September, 1915. The new factories and workshops which we have set up have not yet attained one-third of their full capacity, but their output is increasing with great rapidity. *If officials, employees and workmen keep at it with the same zeal as they have hitherto employed, our supplies will soon be overwhelming ;* but our task is only half accomplished. Every great battle furnishes additional proof that this is a war of equipment. More ammunition means more victories, and fewer casualties."

If Mr. Lloyd George's forecast were justified, the supply of guns and ammunition would be ample by the end of 1916. The new armies were only now coming into the field. The training at home was necessarily insufficient and had to be supplemented after their arrival in France before they could go into action, and the manual labour required of the troops in the preparations for a great attack was so extensive that it would leave little time for this training. By the autumn this factor also would be materially improved. On the other hand, if the Allies remained on the defensive in the West until late in the year, Germany might well mass an overwhelming force against the Russians. Would the French nation stand the strain of waiting in the face of such misfortunes until the British could develop their full strength ? A minor factor, not purely military in character, but one which Haig could not entirely ignore, was that the " amateur strategists," who favoured the distant theatres, were urging on their chief the impregnability of the fortified German positions, and were reported to be gaining strength in the



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councils of the Government. They would not listen to expert opinion ; nothing but the incontestable proof of accomplishment would induce them to alter their views. Haig was confident that an early offensive, even if not decisive, must achieve enough to convert them and ensure that concentration of all available resources in the Western theatre which in his opinion was essential to final victory.

He summed up his review of the whole problem in a brief statement of essentials, placing them in order of importance. He was determined to do what lay in his power to ensure :

1. A vigorous offensive delivered simultaneously by all the Allies who could bring direct pressure to bear upon the main German armies.
2. The postponement of the general and final offensive until the early autumn, when the British armies would have reached the high-water mark of their strength, equipment and training.
3. The rapid completion of all the preparations for this attack, to meet the contingency of the Germans seeking to forestall the Allies by themselves assuming the offensive.

But Haig realized that, while he could recommend this plan, he could not enforce its adoption. He was a new Commander-in-Chief—as yet untried in his position. Joffre, with a year and a half's experience behind him, in general control of the whole of the French force in all theatres, and in direct command of an army in France much larger than the British, must necessarily have the final decision. Haig could only urge his views on Joffre, he could not compel him to accept them ; only in cases of extreme crisis would he be justified in exercising his discretionary power of independence in a refusal to conform to Joffre's schemes.

Already, prior to Haig's promotion to Commander-in-Chief, there had been a conference at Chantilly, attended by General Joffre, Sir John French and representatives of the other Allied Armies, and this conference had reached general agreement on the strategic plan for the Allies in 1916. They

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had decided on a co-ordinated and approximately simultaneous offensive towards the heart of the German strength, by the Russians, the French, the British and the Belgian main armies, with Italy attacking her immediate enemy at the same time.

Only the minimum force was to be employed in secondary theatres: Gallipoli was to be evacuated forthwith, but Salonika was still to be held by the Anglo-French force in spite of the strong opposition of the British representatives.

For the execution of this plan, Joffre had decided that there would be a series of preparatory actions—in the main to be carried out by the Allies of France—and that if and when these preparatory actions had produced the requisite effect, the French would strike a decisive blow with their whole force.

Haig expressed his agreement with the general scheme of the Chantilly conference at a formal visit paid to General Joffre shortly after his assumption of his new office, and in subsequent meetings the plans for the year were evolved in greater detail. So noticeable was the spirit of goodwill and co-operation that characterized these meetings between the two commanders that Sir H. Rawlinson wrote to a friend: "You need have no anxiety as to D. H. getting on well with our Allies. He went down to Chantilly the other day and had a most cordial meeting with Père Joffre. . . . He has since gone down again to be present at the meeting of army group commanders and talk over future plans. So I think our co-operation in the future will be much closer than it has been." The practical outcome of the meetings was that Haig accepted Joffre's general plan and selected for the British offensive two alternative areas, either (1) the area between the Somme and the Vimy Ridge, or (2) the area in Belgium and Northern France lying between the Lys and the sea. While he himself favoured the northern area, he was prepared to accept whichever alternative best suited the plans of Joffre.

Joffre for his part had included in his plan a French attack in the area immediately south of the River Somme, and accordingly Haig finally decided upon the Somme area.

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By the end of 1915 the Allied plan for the operations of the British had assumed definite shape ; a preparatory attack during the spring and participation in the general and simultaneous effort by the Russians and by the Allies in the West later in the year. No one could say when the Russians would be ready ; and no one could foretell definitely whether the Germans would avoid attack, or would themselves take the offensive. Repeatedly in 1914 and 1915 the Germans had forestalled the French efforts by their own attack. To meet this eventuality, Haig proposed that a limited offensive by the British should take place with fifteen to eighteen divisions towards the end of April. If in the meantime the Germans developed a strong attack against the Russians, the British offensive should be strengthened by the addition of ten divisions, and the French should forthwith co-operate on the Somme.

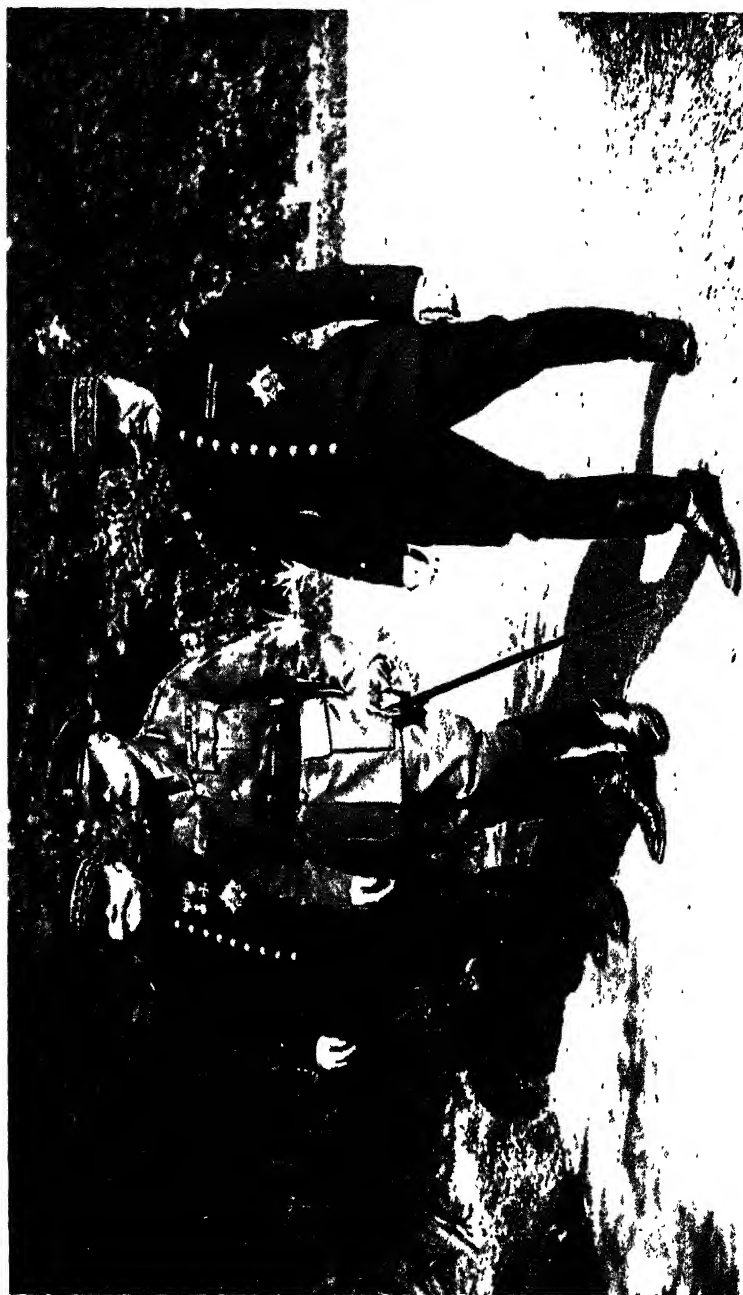
General Joffre accepted this suggestion, but at the same time asked that in addition the British should prepare for a second limited offensive towards the end of May—thus making two British preparatory efforts before the main attack of the Allies.

To this Haig would not agree. He was prepared to deliver one preparatory attack during April, and to do all that he could to wear down the Germans before the main onslaught, but he would not allow his force to be exhausted by a series of disconnected preparatory attacks delivered at long intervals before the principal effort.

The effect of such attacks would, he urged, be counteracted by the time allowed to the Germans to re-form their line and rebuild their units to full strength. A single preparatory attack in the early spring was advisable to disturb the enemy's plans and prevent the development of an offensive against the Russians, but subsequent attacks should not be separated by more than a few weeks from the main effort.

While these matters were still under discussion with General Joffre, the whole situation was changed by the outbreak of the great German attack on the French at Verdun.

All idea of any preparatory attack was temporarily aban-



GENERAL JOFFRE, GENERAL HAIG, GENERAL FOCH  
AT THE FRONT IN 1916

*Photo : Imperial War Museum*



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done, and the two Commanders agreed that if the Verdun attack could be held and if the enemy did not force the Allies' hand by a prior attack on Russia, the great Allied attack should be made about 1st July, astride the Somme on a front of forty-five miles: the French using thirty-nine divisions on a front of thirty miles, and the British twenty-five divisions on a fifteen-mile front. Should the Germans attack the Russians, the date for the joint attack by the French and British would have to be advanced, and all preparations for this were to be made.

At Verdun the position rapidly became serious and even critical. The calm and far-seeing General Joffre himself found it necessary to request Haig both to take over more of the French line and thus set free the French troops, and also to be prepared to send British divisions to reinforce the French Army in case of urgent necessity. Again Haig had to press for a different course. The extra line he could and did take over, but he maintained that the British divisions would be better employed and would render more effective assistance to the hard-pressed French at Verdun by an immediate independent offensive on the front which they already held.

By the middle of March the pressure on Verdun was at its height, and the Germans had still at least ten divisions available on the Western Front, either to accentuate the Verdun effort or to attack elsewhere.

There was at this time some conflict of opinion between the British and French Intelligence Services. The ten available German divisions was common ground, but these were not in themselves sufficient for a decisive effort. The French Intelligence anticipated the transfer of many more German divisions from Russia to France. The British Intelligence Service could find no evidence of the transfer of more than one such division; and Haig, accepting his own Intelligence report, replied to a further request by Joffre for an immediate offensive by the British that he had not yet abandoned hopes of the joint Somme offensive, for which he was pushing forward his preparations. These would be completed by the end of April. He also stated that he was preparing for an alternative offensive in Flanders in case the development

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of the situation did not allow of the joint Anglo-French attack on the Somme. To attack prematurely would be a waste of effort. Verdun was weakening the Germans at least as much as the French. The longer the British blow could be delayed the greater would be its effect.

Events were to justify Haig's view. By the end of March the defence had been reorganized, and with the situation at Verdun once more well in hand, General Joffre found it possible to revert to the original plan of a joint offensive on the Somme: but the plan, though fundamentally the same, had perforce undergone drastic modification in detail.

There could no longer be any necessity—or indeed possibility—of preliminary attacks preceding the main offensive. The attack at Verdun had done all that any preparatory attacks could have accomplished. The whole of the available British forces could now be devoted to the joint offensive on the Somme.

On the other hand, the French could no longer provide thirty-nine divisions. The most they could contribute was five. The decisive effort, instead of being predominantly French, was in fact now to be a great British attack, with a relatively small French force co-operating on the right flank.

It is impossible to pass from an account of this stage of the operations without paying a tribute to the military decision and character of General Joffre. The attack on Verdun was a most serious menace to the French; General Joffre had himself become the target of criticism from French politicians and from the French public. A man with less strength of character and less sound judgment might well have been tempted to gain temporary relief for his own hard-pressed troops at the sacrifice of all chances of a decisive success later in the year.

He could have couched his request for assistance in such terms that it could not have been refused; but Joffre never lost sight of the really vital issue—the counter-stroke by the Allies at the right moment. He had indeed asked for British troops and for a British attack, but he had readily acknowledged the wisdom of Haig's contention that the longer the French could withstand the German onslaught on Verdun

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unaided, the greater would be the prospect of the allied attack in July meeting with success.

It was comparatively easy for Haig, whose troops were not yet seriously engaged, to see the attack on Verdun in its true perspective, as one solitary incident in the World War; but from Joffre it required a unique power of judgment, and a detachment from the purely national outlook. To see his own troops being exhausted, his own country threatened, and his own position assailed from Paris, and yet never to lose his grip upon the situation as a whole, was a test which none but a great commander could have survived.

The historian of the future may criticize the preliminary preparations at Verdun prior to the great German attack, but he will have nothing but praise for the French Commander-in-Chief from the opening moment of the attack until the time when the Battle of the Somme marked the final failure of the German effort.

The part which Haig had had to play in these critical months had been less important, and in many ways invidious. At a time when every instinct must have prompted him to give assistance to his Allies, he was compelled by the hard logic of his reason to withhold it. In so far as he could, without prejudicing the final issue, he had met General Joffre's requests promptly and adequately: but when his level judgment impelled him to differ from his allied Commander-in-Chief he had been adamant. His policy was justified when on the eve of the Battle of the Somme he found himself commanding an army that was intact, highly trained, and complete in every respect—except in its complement of guns and ammunition—ready to relieve the French of the burden of the fighting and to take full advantage of the favourable position which had been brought about by the tenacity and heroism of his Allies at Verdun.

The end of the Verdun crisis left Joffre and Haig with a mutual respect and sympathy that augured well for the harmony and success of their joint operations in the future.

There could be no greater contrast than that presented by the outward appearances of the two great leaders who commanded the French and British forces. General Joffre,



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stout almost to the point of obesity, dressed in a blue tunic, very ample red trousers with the broad black stripe, a massive grey head, with somewhat heavy but very kindly features, using no gestures; affable—yet with a very careful guard on every word he uttered; only occasionally, when a great issue was under discussion, would there be a long pause, and then a torrent of words; as a rule he was slow of speech, and his syllables were marked by the rich French accent of the Midi. If the result of an interview pleased him, Joffre would at its close heave himself out of his chair, go to a cupboard in the wall of his room, extract from it and present to his visitor a pipe inscribed: "*Souvenir du Général en Chef J. Joffre*," and then he would tap his visitor on the shoulder and sink back into his chair. If the result was not satisfactory he would tap himself on the back of the head and murmur humorously: "*Pauvre Joffre!*" but he rarely expressed displeasure by word of mouth to any of those with whom he was dealing.

Haig—lithe, active and firmly knit, always immaculately dressed in khaki service kit, with field boots shining like a mirror, wearing a broad leather waist-belt, but never the ordinary uniform shoulder-belt, his features clear-cut but cold and impassive—seemed the very antithesis of his ally. His only gesture was a strange stiff movement of the forearm as if discarding a used match and an occasional impatient tug at his moustache. The only hint of emotion that he ever gave in conversation was the broadening of his accent towards the Doric, and a queer, humorous twinkle in the keen grey eyes: the rest of his features gave no sign.

He kept little guard on his speech: his candour even with chance visitors was often the despair of his Staff. He made no effort to conceal what was passing in his mind; he always appeared ready to express his uppermost thought, save that on any question on which his actual decision was required he was slow to give any indication of his trend of thought. His manner, even to those intimate with him, though completely courteous, was cold and formal. He appeared to treat those with him rather as a doctor would a patient. If he perceived undue depression he would go out of his way

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to give encouragement, and if he perceived undue elation he would take steps to provide an antidote.

Even officers of high rank who were seeing him regularly always entered his presence with a certain feeling of nervousness. His personal staff used to note with amusement the little symptoms of anxiety of those waiting to be ushered into his room—the distrait manner, the large number of matches used to light cigarettes or pipes—and they were wont to contrast this nervousness with the marked signs of restored confidence of those who had completed their interviews.

At his own mess table Haig was usually silent, but, on the other hand, he liked the others present to engage in general conversation. He would listen attentively to everything that passed, but only very rarely intervened. If visitors to his mess were provided with a fund of anecdotes Haig was frankly pleased, and the only thing that could delay his rising from the table and going to his room to work was a visitor whose anecdotes were unusually entertaining. One in particular, Mr. Beck, a distinguished law officer of the American Republic, appeared one evening almost to mesmerize the Chief; and, for practically the only occasion during the course of the war, he remained for over an hour and a half listening to a long flow of stories and comments on current events, with which Mr. Beck was apparently primed and was ready to tell without hesitation or effort.

Although so unlike in externals, there were many points of close accord between the mentalities of Joffre and Haig. Both were quite imperturbable—neither was depressed by defeat nor unduly elated by success; both were firmly convinced of the power of the Allies to wrest victory from the Germans; both realized that success was unlikely to be attained by some smashing blow of strategy—that the struggle would be a long one and that “dogged” would win. Joffre’s temperament was more akin to that of a Scotsman than of a Frenchman. Like Haig, he was pre-eminently sane. Both men impressed all with whom they came in contact—with the apparent exception of Mr. Lloyd George—with complete confidence in their competence to carry out the task which had been committed to them. Each was prepared to play

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his part as an ally with absolute loyalty ; each realized that his colleague would never lose sight of the correct perspective of the national interests of his own country in relation to the war as a whole.

There are few more remarkable pictures in any of the great military dramas of history than that presented in these early months of 1916. The Germans pressing an attack on a point vital to the very existence of France, achieving a very large measure of success, and hoping to the last moment that the success would be transformed into complete victory : General Joffre confronting this German pressure with a resistance just sufficient to keep the position static, while away in the north the British Army was steadily framing its preparations for a great offensive at a later date, ready at any moment to throw itself into immediate battle should the situation at Verdun require it.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ALLIED STRATEGY, 1916

THE developments of science and their application had revolutionized the character of warfare in 1914-18. In no particular was the change more remarkable than in the collection of information of the enemy's movements and plans.

The magnitude of the forces prevented the concealment of movements of troops in numbers sufficient to influence the issue. The relatively easy passage of neutrals to and from the belligerent states provided facilities for observers of these movements. Nor were means lacking for the rapid transmission of the results of their observations.

The Secret Service of all the Powers involved was highly developed. Complete tactical surprise was almost impossible of achievement ; but strategic surprise was still a possibility. If the plans could be concealed until the actual movement of troops commenced, and if the troops could reach the selected theatre of battle more rapidly than their opponents, great results might be accomplished. By the end of 1915 every German unit was carefully and accurately located on British and French war maps, and every movement became known within a few days at latest after its inception. But the actual plans—the strategy—necessarily remained obscure until the movement began : they could be conjectured and deduced with reasonable probability—they could not always be accurately foretold. It is only since the peace that we can see in true perspective the German plans, and the reasons that led to their adoption.

During the months from November, 1915, to June, 1916,

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the strategy of the Germans is particularly interesting. It was one of the great crises of the war. At the end of 1915 the Germans found themselves already in numerical inferiority on the Franco-Belgian Front, where, moreover, it was only reasonable to expect that the steady expansion of the British Armies would still further accentuate the disparity. The successive German military leaders never wavered in their opinion that it was there and there alone that decisive victory could be won. The problem, therefore, was how to obtain the necessary strength. There could only be certain definite means of effecting their object. They might overwhelm Russia and then set free their own troops in that theatre to reinforce their armies in France. Climatic conditions were against this plan, and to concentrate sufficient forces against Russia would have made them dangerously weak in France and Belgium, where they rightly augured the Allies meant to attack during the spring. That alternative abandoned, there remained only three possibilities: they might secure fresh allies from states of Europe still remaining neutral, or they might induce the Allies to detach large forces from the decisive theatre in France, or they might overwhelm some of the allied armies in distant theatres, and thereby set free troops of the Central Powers to reinforce the German forces in France.

They launched the campaign against Serbia with a joint Austro-German force in September, 1915, and by February, 1916, they had accomplished much. Serbia, the only Balkan Power then on the side of the Allies, had been totally defeated; Bulgaria, hitherto neutral, had aligned herself on the side of Germany, and the Allies had detached no less than ten divisions from the Western Front to the Balkan area.

It was possible once again for Germany to consider an offensive in one of the main theatres. General Falkenhayn—then in control of the German strategy—had realized that the force of Great Britain was Germany's principal danger. It was impossible to strike at the heart of Great Britain, but British power was being used largely through the French. If France retired from the war, "England's best sword," in Falkenhayn's own words, "would be knocked out of

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her hands," and Falkenhayn believed that "the strength of France had almost reached breaking-point." Her army still fought bravely, but her casualties had been great, her available reserves of man-power were practically exhausted, and her people already showed signs of "war weariness." Further heavy casualties in the Army might lead to the French nation seeking peace—a peace not indeed of defeat, but of stalemate.

Falkenhayn accordingly sought for a battle area where the French could not evade the pressure by skilful manœuvres, and selected Verdun. Verdun was as vital to France as the Channel Ports were to the British Armies. There could be no question of an elastic defence; every available French soldier would be thrown into the fight. "The forces of France," Falkenhayn concluded, "would bleed to death."

Mr. Winston Churchill in his book expresses the opinion that the decision of the Germans to attack at Verdun was an error of judgment, and considers that they should have devoted the early months of 1916 to overaweing and converting Roumania to their cause, with the double object of obtaining possession of the granaries and the oil fields of that area and of securing the dissipation of the British forces. This criticism is faulty. The Germans had no grounds for assuming that the Allies would make the great strategic blunder of dissipating their force still further; and the danger from an attack by the Allies on the Eastern and Western Front of Germany itself would be greatly increased by the withdrawal from the decisive area of sufficient troops to deal with Roumania.

Nor does the ultimate failure of the German strategy for 1916 justify its dismissal as unsound: it was clear-cut and firm and was pursued with determination. It failed, but it went near to success. It totally upset the Allied plans. It postponed final defeat until after 1916. The scales were already so weighted against Germany that more than this could hardly have been accomplished. Nothing but gross misuse of the resources of the Allies could have prevented their ultimate victory.

The conference at Chantilly (mentioned on p. 190) had

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arrived at a plan that was as clear-cut and firm as that of the Germans; but it was not within the power of the distinguished soldiers who attended the conference to ensure that it was executed with determination. The assent or co-operation of the various Cabinets had yet to be obtained, and in the Cabinets there was discord and dissension. Early in January Sir William Robertson had informed Haig that there was a strong section in the British Cabinet opposed to offensive operations in France—either in the spring or indeed at any later time. A statesman of as high a standing as Mr. Balfour had circulated a strong indictment of the decisions of the Chantilly conference. One member of the Cabinet wanted the armies to go to the Balkans, another preferred Bagdad, and another wished to wait until the Germans should attack on the French front. All the efforts of Lord Kitchener and of Sir William Robertson, backed by the views of Sir Douglas Haig, had failed to obtain anything more definite than a direction that “preparations for carrying out an offensive should be made,” but it was expressly stipulated that “this must not be assumed as a definite decision in favour of that offensive.”

Sir William Robertson points out in his book, “Soldiers and Statesmen,” that: “The military authorities were thus left without a specific policy—but with a formula which was liable to be interpreted in different ways by different ministers, according to their own individual wishes.”

The Cabinet had, in fact, become a welter of political intrigues. The purely Liberal Government had given place to a Coalition. Its formation had created bitter enmities or feelings of disappointed ambition. Its own existence was precarious. As one reads the various revelations that have appeared since the conclusion of the war it is difficult to resist the conclusion that a party or personal victory would in the minds of many members of the Coalition have afforded at least a substantial consolation for a military or naval mishap. Nor—to their shame be it said—were there lacking soldiers who were prepared to take their share in these petty squabbles. It is small wonder that decisive rulings emerged but rarely from the Council Chamber, and that British effort during

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this period was dissipated. The pitcher was leaking at the top.

A similar state of affairs was reflected to a lesser extent in the situation in France. The initial success of the German attack at Verdun had brought to light inadequate preparations on the French defensive line, and sharp criticism of General Joffre resulted. Clemenceau—not then in power, but always possessed of great influence, to whose subsequent leadership the Allies owed so much—at this time feared the effect of any attack by France which was not a complete success. He distrusted Joffre and had apparently already resolved on his removal. Monsieur Briand, still Prime Minister, although he supported Joffre, was influenced by the strength of the anti-clerical political movement in France, and tried to placate its adherents by finding a high command for General Sarrail—a soldier whose political claims outweighed his military capacity. Moved by these political considerations, M. Briand threw his weight in favour of the Salonika Expedition, and Joffre did not see his way to resist the pressure.

Thus in England the situation resolved itself into political intrigues against the Prime Minister, and a germinating distrust of its military advisers (Lord Kitchener and Sir William Robertson) by the Cabinet; but as yet complete confidence in Sir Douglas Haig. In France political intrigues were directed not against the Prime Minister but against the Commander in the Field. In contradistinction to this, however, there stood a phalanx of the responsible military authorities of both nations in complete accord in essentials. General Joffre, Haig and Robertson saw eye to eye with Lord Kitchener; and Lord Kitchener, though exposed to attacks from politicians and the Press, still retained the trust of the nation and the Prime Minister. He was still able to interpose his authority and prevent undue political interference in the internal affairs of the military forces; and Mr. Asquith himself, though harassed by the plots of his colleagues, was unswervingly loyal to the soldiers both in the field and at home.



## CHAPTER XIV

### EARLY MONTHS OF 1916

MEANWHILE, during the early months of 1916 when the French Army was enduring its ordeal at Verdun, there was relatively little fighting on the British front.

A series of small attacks maintained the pressure on the enemy and preserved the high level of the fighting spirit among the British troops, but Haig was able to devote considerable time to the organization and preparation of his Army for the great offensive which was to mark the culmination of the British military effort in 1916.

The new armies were now reaching France in ever increasing numbers, and measures for the perfection of their training were in full swing.

Haig had instituted from the first days of his Command a system of weekly conferences with his Army Commanders, taking place in rotation at the headquarters of the various armies. He paid frequent visits to the Headquarters of all his Corps, and had found time to visit at least once the Headquarters of each of his Divisions. He devoted great care and attention to the improvement of the administrative arrangements throughout the whole army. He enforced the issue from Headquarters of a series of memoranda to guide the operations of the troops in every branch of the fighting which they might have to encounter. He had sifted out both Commanders and Staffs throughout the whole army, and was well satisfied that when the call came each link in the chain was strong enough to bear the strain that would be imposed upon it.

He moved his Headquarters from St. Omer to Montreuil, where they remained until the Armistice. There the offices were located in a large barracks ; his own Headquarters



*Photo : Imperial War Museum*

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S CHÂTEAU AT MONTREUIL—G.H.Q., FRANCE



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were in a château, a short distance outside the town. Only his Chief of Staff and his personal A.D.C.'s shared his mess with him. Except at rare intervals he seldom visited the Headquarters Offices. The Heads of Departments had definite days and hours for their interviews with him. Each hour of the day was rigidly allotted to the disposal of business, which became as methodical as a great industrial concern in time of peace. All the threads led direct to the one large room in the Chief's own Headquarters, where at a desk (on which there was hardly ever a single paper) he controlled the whole of the vast and intricate ramifications of the growing British Army. A great map covered one wall. Seldom was any matter brought to him and not immediately disposed of. Very seldom did he find it necessary to retain memoranda or other statements for further perusal before giving his decision.

He rarely used the telephone himself. He cherished an ineradicable belief that conversations were inaccurate and liable to be distorted over the telephone, and that the agency of a third person using the telephone on his behalf ensured greater care and accuracy.

Each day he saw the heads of the chief branches of the Staff, and each day his own doctor found an opportunity of visiting him. His personal servant—Sergeant Secrett—kept almost as close a watch upon the Chief as the Chief did on the Army. If he was late in going to bed, if he omitted his physical exercises, if his rest was disturbed and his appetite failed, Secrett reported it to Col. Ryan, and Ryan exercised all the authority of a house physician in a great hospital on a recalcitrant patient. Senior Officers whose whole day was coloured by a word of praise or blame from the Chief, would listen with amazement to Ryan "telling off" the Chief. "If you don't sleep you won't last," Ryan would say sternly. "I told you to go to bed at eleven." And the Chief would reply mildly—though with the suspicion of a twinkle in his eye: "All right, I'll be good."

Punctually at 8.25 each morning Haig's bedroom door opened, and he walked downstairs. In the hall was a barometer, and he invariably stopped in front of the instrument to tap it, though he rarely took any particular note of

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the reading. He then went for a short four minutes' walk in the garden. At 8.30 precisely he came into the mess for breakfast. If he had a guest present, he always insisted on serving the guest before he helped himself. He talked very little, and generally confined himself to asking his personal staff what their plans were for the day. At nine o'clock he went into his study and worked until eleven or half-past. At half-past eleven he saw Army Commanders, the Heads of Departments at General Headquarters, and others whom he might desire to see. At one o'clock he had lunch, which only lasted half an hour, and then he either motored or rode to the Headquarters of some Army or Corps or Division. He was careful to avoid giving the Headquarter messes of subordinate units the trouble of providing meals for himself and his staff, and on days when he wished to visit a distant part of the line he used to take a luncheon basket with him in his car. When going by car he was usually accompanied by his Private Secretary, Sir Philip Sassoon. Generally when returning from these visits he would arrange for his horse to meet the car so that he could travel the last three or four miles on horseback. When not motoring he always rode in the afternoon, accompanied by an A.D.C. and his escort of 17th Lancers, without which he never went out for a ride. Always on the return journey from his ride he would stop about three miles from home and hand his horse over to a groom and walk back to Headquarters. On arrival there he would go straight up to his room, have a bath, do his physical exercises and then change into slacks. From then until dinner-time at 8 o'clock he would sit at his desk and work, but he was always available if any of his staff or guests wished to see him. He never objected to interruptions at this hour. At 8 o'clock he dined. After dinner, which lasted about an hour, he returned to his room and worked until a quarter to eleven. At this hour he rang the bell for his Private Secretary, and invariably greeted him with the same remark: "Philip—not in bed yet?" He never changed this formula, and if, as did occasionally happen, Philip was in bed, he always used to say to him next morning: "I hope you have had enough sleep?"

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There were only rare occasions when this routine of the Commander-in-Chief's day was broken even by a minute.

Haig knew the name of every Army Corps or Division Commander and in what part of the line they were situated. He would often test his staff by asking "Who commands such and such a corps?" Any reference to a notebook annoyed him, and he would say: "You ought to know that; it is so and so."

He required those working with him to train their memories. An A.D.C. who on his first interview for orders produced a slip of paper and pencil to take notes was abruptly told that unless he could trust his memory he would have to go back to regimental duty.

There was an almost uninterrupted flow of prominent statesmen from London to the Chief's château in France. On January 30th Mr. Lloyd George paid his first visit. Although Haig appreciated Mr. Lloyd George's vitality, there was nothing in common between the outlook of the two men, and the seeds of a deep and mutual distrust were already sown.

To Haig the essential method of arriving at a decision was complete knowledge and study of all the factors, and then a considered and most firmly held judgment. A decision arrived at by a conscious mental process of this nature is not easily disturbed in any man; in Haig the strongly developed self-confidence emphasized the tendency. He would willingly consider any new factor and amend, if necessary, his judgment to meet it; but unless there was a new factor he was not ready to reopen consideration of a problem on which he had arrived at a conclusion. Mere "opinions" weighed little with him. He required logical reasoning.

On February 9th Lord Kitchener paid his last visit to Haig's Headquarters. Although their views diverged from time to time there was always the greatest mutual respect between the two men. In temperament and characteristic they were totally distinct. To Haig's reasoned arguments Kitchener had nothing to offer except unconscious mental processes, arriving with amazing frequency at correct conclusions. With Haig it was logic, with Kitchener instinct or genius.

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Haig was straightforward and direct ; Kitchener, possibly as a result of his long sojourn in the East, was not averse to tortuous methods of attaining his objectives. Haig always credited everyone with high motives unless overwhelming proof convinced him to the contrary ; Kitchener had an underlying distrust of every man until he had tried and proved him. Haig was always content to leave the details to others, and was satisfied to direct in chief himself ; Kitchener liked to feel his hand on and in everything. His normal method of dealing with all his written orders and communications was to insist on the responsible staff officer preparing the document for his signature. If the draft submitted did not meet with his approval it was returned for correction, and the process was repeated until a final form which met with his complete concurrence was produced. To this process during the time he was Commander-in-Chief there were, so far as is known, only two exceptions. The famous Back to the Wall Order was written in his own hand, and during the early months of his command when the Senior Artillery officer submitted a draft General Order commemorating the bicentenary of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, which did not meet with Haig's approval, he wrote himself in blue pencil on a sheet of foolscap the Order which appeared.

The curious paradox was that Haig had mastered every detail of military affairs ; Kitchener had surprisingly little knowledge of detail.

Kitchener had wide interests outside military matters—art, science, politics, literature claimed their share of his mind ; Haig's whole mind and life were concentrated on the army and on war.

Kitchener's genius revealed itself at ever increasing intervals. There is much truth in the saying attributed to Mr. Lloyd George, that his mind was like a lighthouse, with recurring flashes of penetrating insight followed by long intervals of deep gloom. Haig's mentality was always equally active, his mind working at all times with mechanical precision. Haig the cavalryman had far more the mind of an engineer than Kitchener the sapper.

Both soldiers had inflexible wills, both had great self-

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confidence ; each vied with the other in a supreme devotion to duty. Neither made many intimate friends—yet both had the power of gaining loyal service and devoted attachment from those who worked closest to them.

It is related that in South Africa Kitchener replied to an officer who had argued against an order : “ You have given me ten excellent reasons why you should not do what I tell you to do—now go and do it.” In France on the rare occasions when a subordinate commander was not convinced of the soundness of orders issued to him, and asked for their alteration, Haig would entrust the task to another. Though impatient of criticism, he would always listen to any views, however different from his own, and would give them careful consideration. He would never argue. If any attempt was made to prolong the discussion beyond a brief reasoned statement he would bring the conversation to an abrupt conclusion. One officer who defended his contention with undue vehemence was ordered to leave the room—yet Haig accepted the advice he had offered.

Kitchener had felt the distrust evinced by Sir John French's Press campaign very keenly. He had not allowed his personal feelings to deflect him from making every effort to ensure cordial co-operation between the War Office and General Headquarters. But with Haig, he knew there could never be any question of departure from the rigid and unswerving loyalty of the Army in the Field to the civil authority which he represented. Haig was also fully conscious that Kitchener would fulfil to the uttermost the promises of support conveyed in his charter when promoted to Command. Divergence of view might occur, but nothing could shake the cordial relationship between the Commander-in-Chief and the Secretary of State.

On the evening of Kitchener's arrival at General Headquarters on his last visit, he was showing distinct signs of the strain which he had undergone. He seemed very weary, both mentally and physically ; there was none of his old domineering decision. Lord Kitchener was at the time fully aware of the attacks which were being made on him at home, and he was strangely depressed, and for the first time he



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appeared to Haig to be lacking in confidence. When he had retired, Haig remarked: "It is a strange tragedy to see a great man so broken," but on the following day, revived by the night's rest, Lord Kitchener was as alert and self-confident to all outward appearances as he had been in his prime.

They had a long discussion in the early hours of the morning, Kitchener seeking to impress upon Haig his own view of the probable outcome of the fighting in France. Some of the Press articles which had emanated from General Headquarters, and even some of the official papers passing between General Headquarters and London, had given Kitchener the impression that Haig and his staff were bent upon seeking to pierce the German fortress-line at one effort. Lord Kitchener would have none of it. Not only to Haig, but—after the conclusion of his interview with him—to the heads of certain branches of the General Staff, Kitchener was unusually emphatic in his assertion that there must be no question of piercing the front. "The war," he said, "is not against the men immediately opposed to you, it is against the German nation. The Allied armies must press against the German line, and strike it hard and repeatedly: some day the front will waver and bend, but," he added, "let me never hear from anyone in France any mention even of the words, 'piercing the line.'"

Although neither Haig nor his Staff wholly agreed with Lord Kitchener's theory (which eventually proved incorrect), there were many occasions during the succeeding two years when it seemed to be justified.

On June 9th an intercepted official German wireless message\* announced the sinking of the *Hampshire*, and the death of Lord Kitchener. A few hours later the confirmation of the news came from London.

\* The fact that the first news came from German sources gave immediate rise to the rumour that the *Hampshire* had been sunk by a German submarine, and that the Germans had had full information of Lord Kitchener's plan to embark in her. Actually the Germans received the information from London, through neutral sources, owing to the premature issue to the Press of an official British communiqué. This communiqué was recalled almost as soon as issued, and another substituted a few hours later, but the London correspondent of a neutral paper had at once despatched the news to his own country, whence it had been transmitted to Germany.

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The news filled Haig not only with genuine regret but with grave misgivings. Although some months earlier he had recommended that the General Staff under Robertson should be constituted the sole responsible adviser of the Cabinet on military policy and the conduct of the war, independent of the control of the Secretary of State, he had fully appreciated the difficulties that Lord Kitchener had had to encounter, and which in many cases he had surmounted. Moreover, the cordial relations which had existed for the past few months between Kitchener and Robertson had resulted in full and complete Cabinet consideration of and attention to military problems.

From the moment that the report of Lord Kitchener's death reached him Haig realized that the danger of civilian interference in military plans would once more become acute. His first remark when the news of Lord Kitchener's death was brought to him was: "How shall we get on without him?" Lord Kitchener's prestige in the country had enabled him to interpose the full weight of his influence against the commission of the worst follies, even when the Cabinet's confidence in himself had wavered, but now his restraining hand was finally removed.

While at the War Office it had been a part of Haig's duty to define the different spheres of work of the soldiers and statesmen. The results of his work had been compiled in the official Manual of Field Regulations. Haig had viewed with some alarm Lord Kitchener's admixture of civil and military duties in the early months of the war; but during the time of his own command—with Robertson at the War Office—the correct relationship had been re-established. Kitchener himself had not only approved the reversion to the more orthodox position, but had proved a bulwark of strength both to Haig and to Robertson.

For the time being, however, Haig's apprehensions seemed groundless. Robertson, now firmly seated in the saddle at the War Office, appeared to have gained the confidence of the Cabinet. Mr. Asquith was prepared to give him his full support.

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It was not until Mr. Asquith's Government fell and Mr. Lloyd George acceded to power that the full effects of Lord Kitchener's loss were realized, and all Haig's worst fears fulfilled.

Haig's confidence in his own judgment had strengthened during these early weeks of his period of command. He dominated both his staff and the distinguished band of soldiers who now commanded the armies under him.

He had an amazing power of keeping discussion centred on relevant topics. To a subordinate in South African days who had sought to embellish a report by vivid words, he had said: "Don't be a damned fool; stick to facts." Now he would cut short senior commanders and staff officers in more restrained but equally effective phrase. A cold, "Don't ramble; say what you have to say," was calculated to bring any man to the point.

Any tendency to undue excitement in anyone—high or low—with whom he came in contact, called forth a frigid, "Don't fuss." He had a few favourite aphorisms which he frequently used: "It is the spirit that quickeneth"—"It is better to command in chief than to be concerned in all"—"Aim high, perchance you may attain." To these he now added one borrowed from Mr. Asquith: "Don't mistake bustle for business."

Yet the deep underlying sympathy with humanity in all its weaknesses and frailty was continually evident. He was ruthless in removing those whom he considered incompetent for the task required of them, but he would be at great pains to soften the blow by a kindly word. "You have done your best, none of us can do more." "There is work elsewhere that you can do, and will do well; wherever you may be you will be helping to win the war."

There is a picture that will always remain vivid in the minds of those who were present when Haig chanced to meet, returning from the trenches in the early days of 1915, a battalion in which almost every man was suffering from trench feet. They could only move a hundred yards or so and then rest for some minutes, but with unconquerable

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spirit they were singing and whistling as they struggled onwards.\*

He stopped the column, and passing slowly down the ranks exchanged a few words with each man. Then mounting, he watched the men resume their weary march. He was deeply moved. "What right have we," he said, "to any credit, when these men are enduring so much."

The word "endure" had by this time become a common word in his vocabulary. In his General Orders to the Army the virtue of endurance was constantly stressed. In his letter to Lord Rawlinson, written when the Armistice was signed, he said :

"It is due to the generous support which you and the other high commanders have given me, that I have been able to endure to the victorious end."

The fortitude that endures until the end ever made the greatest appeal to Haig. In those early days of his command was born in his mind the determination, which dominated his whole life in the years succeeding the war, to do what in him lay to help forward the fortunes of those who fought under him.

In his afternoon rides, when he tore his mind away from the all-pervading question of the actual conduct of operations, this became a frequent topic of conversation. He would recall incidents of men who had fought in the South African War and fallen on the thorns of life in later years, and his mind already foresaw the magnitude and difficulties of the problem that peace would bring to the nation when the ex-soldier had to be reabsorbed into civil life.

\* One of the songs was an anglicized version of the German "Hymn of Hate" :

"'Ate of the 'eart, 'ate of the 'and."

## CHAPTER XV

### BATTLE OF THE SOMME

ALTHOUGH the Allies were now in a position to launch their general attack in France, yet the situation was very different from that which had been foreseen at the beginning of the year. The plans for the Battle of the Somme itself, regarded as a whole, had changed their character, although in the essentials as far as concerned the British force there had been little alteration. The battle had originally been conceived as a portion—though not the principal operation—of a co-ordinated and simultaneous Allied effort in all the main theatres of the war. In origin it was to have been a preliminary effort to engage and exhaust the German resources, prior to the main French offensive elsewhere.

Thereafter General Joffre's decision to throw a great attack of the French immediately south of the Somme had again changed the plans of the battle into one in which the British Army would bear a share at best only equal to that of the French. At this stage, General Joffre envisaged a decisive battle, and the breaking of the German lines and the reaping of the fruits of victory from the Somme Battle itself.

Verdun had necessitated a great reduction in the number of French troops available for their share in the joint battle, and eventually, as the plans took final shape, it became clear that the principal burden would have to be borne by the British. There were to be no preparatory infantry engagements; the hopes of a break-through had become faint—if they were not indeed abandoned by the French Commander-in-Chief.

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In the final order of battle Haig had nineteen divisions (of which six were in reserve) on a front of attack of fifteen miles. The main effort was on a front of ten miles immediately north of the Somme. South of the river the French attacked on a front of six miles, using five divisions for the assault. The Battle of Verdun had therefore reduced the French effort from thirty-nine divisions to five. Thus, part of the general plan had to be abandoned ; there could be no question with this number of French troops of the attack turning south to roll up any portion of the German line.

But the basis of the British plan remained the same—to press forward ultimately to the Letransloy-Achiet position, and then north-east, with the French protecting their right flank. This was the maximum at which the British commander could aim ; the course of the battle alone could decide whether even this would be possible. There were many uncertain factors : guns and ammunition were still not available in sufficient quantities according to comparison with previous battles, although the discrepancy was balanced to some extent by utilizing French artillery. New and untried troops were to be engaged for the first time. There could be no absolute certainty of the number of troops that the Germans might set free to reinforce their line as the battle progressed. The rate of advance could only be roughly estimated prior to the actual fighting. On the other hand, the moral of the troops was high ; the determination of both commanders and men was firm ; and the spirit of the Germans could not but be impaired by their lack of success at Verdun and by the news of the Russian successes in the East.

The objects of the battle as conceived by Haig have been given in his official despatches. They were threefold.

1. To relieve the pressure on Verdun.
2. To assist our Allies in the other theatres of war by stopping any further transfer of German troops from the Western Front.
3. To wear down the strength of the forces opposed to us.

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It is noteworthy that not only had the relative importance of the part which the British troops were to play in the joint battle been increased—they were to be the principal and not the subsidiary factor—but also the principles on which operations were to be conducted conformed to the British view of the war rather than to the French. Throughout the whole of the operations of 1914-1915, and again in the early months of 1916, the theory which the French General Staff had worked out in peace time of a decisive break through the lines of the opposing army governed the fighting.

Haig's view of the war had never varied since the beginning: what he had taught in Simla in 1910 he gave effect to throughout the period of his command, and reiterated in his final despatch at the end of the war. "In the Great War," he points out, "there were the same general features, and the same necessary stages which between forces of approximately equal strength have marked all the conclusive battles of history. There is in the first instance the preliminary stage of the campaign in which the opposing forces seek to deploy and manœuvre for position, endeavouring while doing so to gain some early advantage which might be pushed home to quick decision. . . . Battle having been joined, there follows the period of real struggle in which the main forces of the two belligerent Armies are pitted against each other in close and costly combat. Each commander seeks to wear down the power of resistance of his opponent and to pin him to his position, while preserving or accumulating in his own hands a powerful reserve force with which he can manœuvre, and when signs of the enemy becoming morally and physically weakened are observed, deliver the decisive attack. . . . Finally, whether from the superior fighting ability and leadership of one of the belligerents, as the result of greater resources or tenacity, or by reason of higher moral, or from a combination of all these causes, the time will come when the other side will begin to weaken and the climax of the battle is reached."

In pursuance of this view of war the initial stages of the Battle of the Somme were planned as part of the wearing-down fight. The results were not to be achieved at a single blow: there was to be continuous, severe and prolonged

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fighting, each point gained was to be held tenaciously, and the utmost pressure in the direction of further advance was to be maintained with the least possible delay. This was the principle that dominated the plans of the Battle of the Somme.

There were periods in the battle when many of those around Haig—and indeed Haig himself—felt that the battle might develop into the final stage, and to the end of his life Haig maintained that if all our commitments in outside theatres had been reduced to a minimum, and all available men, guns and ammunition had been concentrated on the fighting on the Somme, complete victory might have been within our grasp in the last months of 1916.

As has already been noted this view has received unexpected and remarkable confirmation in the writings of the German leaders, but in the actual orders issued by Haig during the battle there is no trace of anything further than a persistent and determined continuance of the wearing-down fight.

The actual battle plan in broad outline comprised the breaking back of the German lines on both sides of the Somme to a position whence the British on the north and the French to the south could change the direction of their attack north-east and south-west respectively, and roll up the portion of the German lines which was not submitted to direct frontal attack.

Surveying the whole of the European theatres of war, it is noteworthy that although the strategic plans of the Allies had had to meet the great German attack at Verdun, yet the main principle of a combined Allied attack in all theatres had been attained.

During June the Russians under Brusiloff, in response to an appeal from the Italian Front, had delivered an important and successful attack on the Austro-Hungarians opposed to them. Germany abandoned her Eastern offensive and was forced to denude that front of troops to bolster up the Austro-Hungarian army. Ludendorff's comment on the unfavourable position of the Central Powers was: "The face of the war had entirely changed: not much later the opening of the Somme battle and Roumania's declaration of war were to make our position still more unfavourable."



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It was, then, with high hopes that Haig moved forward from Montreuil to an advanced Battle Headquarters for his first great battle in command of the British Army. He took with him all his own Staff Officers concerned with the conduct of the fighting: his Chief of Staff, his Director of Military Operations, the head of his Intelligence, and his Personal Staff. He left behind him the Administrative Staff Officers, and the bulk of the General Staff to deal with all routine work.

The battle had been planned to begin on June 28th, but heavy rain on the 26th, 27th and 28th compelled its postponement until July 1st. As early as the 24th the artillery bombardment had opened, and continued without intermission and in increasing severity until the infantry attack was launched. On the 29th the weather cleared, the sky was still overcast, but there were long intervals of sunshine.

To an onlooker the scene was one of strange and awful grandeur. Overhead more than a score of observation balloons hung in the sky, aeroplanes circled like birds of prey; on the ground there was nothing but bare desolation, stark ruins that once had been villages, and gaunt skeletons of trees; the roar of the guns and the crash of the shells shook the ground as the gigantic artillery duel continued; far as the eye could see into the enemy lines no sign of movement or life could be discerned save the flash of the guns.

During the night of 30th June the bombardment was incessant, and behind the British lines there were columns of troops, some large, some small, moving up to their positions, all of them eager, almost all of them whistling as they marched.

Dawn broke with a clear sky and still air, but with mist hanging over the low-lying ground. The bombardment became terrific. At 7.30 the ripple of rifle fire and the sharp crackle of the machine gun increased the tumult as the British went over the top on a front of sixteen miles, and the dead desolation of the German lines became alive with defending troops.

The main attack, under Sir Henry Rawlinson, was divided into two sections by the great Albert-Bapaume Road. Further north there was a subsidiary attack under Sir Edmund Allenby. On the right section of the main attack progress was rapid and deep. Mametz and Montauban fell on the

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first day, and the capture of Fricourt followed on the second day of the battle, but on the left only the first line of German trenches was taken, and in the subsidiary attack there was a reverse. The German resistance on this front was adequate, and the night of July 1st found our troops in this area back in their own trench line and with heavy casualties.

Great though the results achieved had been, to Haig the final result was a disappointment. The position he had hoped to reach through the impetus of the first assault was still in German hands.

Although Haig had not at any time expected a breakthrough at a single blow, he had anticipated further progress. Now he had to set himself to meet an altered situation: if the results fell short of expectations, the first day's fighting had left the British in a position from which much could be gained if prompt advantage was taken of its possibilities. That night Haig amended his plan.

Sir Henry Rawlinson's line was contracted to that section where deep inroads had been made into the enemy's position, and he was ordered to press forward the general attack on the morrow. Further north it was resolved to adopt slower methods. The German line was to be eaten away by successive smaller attacks like the erosion of a cliff by the sea, and Sir Hubert Gough was brought up to take charge of this part of the operations.

For four more days Sir Henry Rawlinson's force pressed relentlessly forward; then the exhaustion of his troops necessitated a pause, but already the British line on a front of more than six miles had penetrated to a depth of over a mile into the fortress of the German lines. The whole of the forward system of their defence line had fallen, and a mile ahead of the British line there was the strong but far less formidable entrenched second line.

For the commencement of his second blow, Haig resolved on the bold experiment of a night operation on a front of three miles. Immediately night fell on July 13th small parties moved out from the British front lines over the open ground between the two armies, and with white tapes marked guiding lines for the assaulting troops.

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An hour later the troops themselves advanced, and by dawn on the 14th were in position within a few hundred yards of the Germans. Immediately there was sufficient light to distinguish friend from foe, they swept over the German lines. For three days the battle raged—attack succeeded by counter-attack. When on the 17th fighting again died down, the whole of the German second line of defence was in British hands, the number of prisoners taken since July 1st had risen to over ten thousand, and nearly four miles of the crest-line of the great ridge which dominated the Somme battlefield had been captured.

Meanwhile, the Germans had been rushing reinforcements to the battle area. Already by July 17th their strength had been doubled. The advance of Rawlinson's Army had created a sharp salient in the general line, which invited counter-attack from the enemy, and rendered any further advance impossible until the flanks had been brought up.

The long wearing-out battle, so long foreseen by Haig, was now at its height, and for the two months that followed there ensued what he himself in his Despatches calls a "real trial of strength between the opposing forces." Each side fully grasped the object of his opponent. There was no possibility of surprise—nothing but dogged determination and greater fighting power could bring the British and their French allies on their right to the position necessary for a further advance which the Germans were determined to deny them. In this titanic trial of strength the British won. In a succession of fierce attacks, followed each and every one by most determined counter-attacks, the British New Armies forced their way forward against all the resistance of the veteran army of Germany.

By the end of the first week in September, five miles—practically the whole—of the crest of the main ridge was in British hands. Further to the north Gough's army had made notable progress, while to the south the French, though still somewhat behind the advanced British front, were sufficiently far forward to be able to co-operate in a further advance.

On the 15th September the third of Haig's great blows

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in this long-drawn battle was delivered. Again under the command of Sir Henry Rawlinson the British troops swept forward.

With the formidable assistance of the tanks,\* now for the first time in battle, on a front of six miles southwards from the Albert-Bapaume Road, the line was advanced for over a mile. Ten days later (September 25th) the attack was renewed, and a further, though smaller, advance was made.

On the following day Sir Hubert Gough advanced the left of the British line by a notable success at Thiepval. On the right progress had been less satisfactory. Saïlly-Saïllisel still held out against the French, and once more Rawlinson's force was in a pronounced salient; but Haig still entertained high hopes that before the end of the year the whole of the Allied plan might be accomplished. The resistance of the enemy had weakened. The succession of defeats had decreased his moral, while the spirit of our own troops was correspondingly high.

There should still be at least one month of the autumn

\* There has been much criticism of the use of the tanks at this stage of their development. It is argued by Mr. W. Churchill and others that they were still only few in number. Within a limited period a vastly greater strength of tanks might have been accumulated—to use a small number prematurely was to forfeit in a small effort the great and incalculable factor of surprise. These considerations were all taken into account when Haig decided to throw them into the battle. His Intelligence Service had already information that showed that the Germans were even now alive to the existence of some new implement of war about to be used by the British. It could only be a matter of time before the German Intelligence Service would obtain complete information and might be able to evolve an adequate protection in response to the tanks. There was leakage at home. A demonstration of the tanks had been given in England at which a very large number of unofficial spectators, including members of the House of Commons, had been present. Letters taken by the censorship had shown that full information was being sent by one at least of the spectators to neutral countries, whence it would inevitably reach Germany. Censorship of letters from the Armies in France revealed a similar danger of betrayal. Even if an adequate defence or reply to the tanks was not forthcoming on the German side, the very knowledge of their existence and capacity would exclude the fear of the unknown, so potent a factor on the moral of an army.

Moreover, however careful and far-seeing the design and tactical use of a new weapon may be, nothing except actual experience in battle can fully disclose both its strength and its weakness. It was better to test the new tank in its present numbers, before the whole resources of the factories were committed to the present design. Finally the fighting now about to begin was no small battle. It was the biggest foreseen at the time. Even the small number of tanks now available might give most potent assistance to the assault, and might save many valuable British lives. It was on these grounds that Haig resolved to throw the new arm into the battle, and the decision would appear to be well justified.

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remaining before weather conditions put a stop to active operations.

Haig's plan was to advance the line to the outskirts of Bapaume, thence the British were to attack north and north-east, turning the whole of the enemy's defences south of the Scarpe, and then enforce a general withdrawal of all the German lines in that area.

When success was almost within his grasp he had to face disappointment. Early in October the weather broke. There was continuous rain for the whole of the month, and for the first few days of November.

The ground, torn by the shells, became a morass; the trenches channels of deep mud; even the roads, damaged by the continuous stream of traffic and by the incessant artillery fire, were almost impassable. No further great attack was possible in front of the war-swept Somme area, but away to the north conditions were not so bad, and Haig brought the year's operations to a close by a series of smaller operations on the Ancre.

The results of even the first period of fighting on the Somme, unsatisfactory though it had been to Haig, had accomplished at least one of the ultimate objects\* of the battle—the pressure on Verdun was at once relieved. The Germans had to rush troops to a front now seriously threatened by the British attack. In the subsequent fighting the enemy's casualties were great, and although the casualties on our own side had also been severe, yet the Allies—and in particular Britain—could face these losses with comparative equanimity owing to the undeveloped resources still at their disposal, while Germany could not but feel the effect of the heavy drain on resources that were already weakened.

By the end of August it could be fairly argued that the second objective had been equally accomplished. Germany was no longer in a position to contemplate any large transfer of troops from the Western Front to other theatres. Roumania was about to declare war on Germany (August 27th-28th), and the effect of the whole Somme attack on the Allies, existing and potential, was very marked.

The third—and in Haig's opinion the most important—

\* See page 215.

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of the objects had not been achieved, and there could be no question at this stage of breaking off the battle, or even of easing the pressure.

Although the relations between Joffre and Haig throughout the battle were cordial, there had been occasions when Haig had been forced to insist on the independence of his command. On the third day of the battle there arose a sharp difference of opinion. General Joffre and General Foch came together to British Headquarters, and Joffre urged very strongly that the main British effort should be directed on Thiepval-Serre. Haig would have none of it: the German resistance in that area was at its strongest; ground would only be gained by a heavy expenditure both of lives and of munitions, and in Haig's opinion the tactical advantages would not be as great as those to be derived from a similar effort more directly threatening the rearward portion of the enemy's defences. Haig decided to develop his attack towards Montauban. The conference became heated: General Joffre even went so far as to "insist" on his own point of view, but Haig declined to give way, and the results justified his decision.

There have appeared from time to time accounts of the interview which give the impression that the relations of the two Commanders were strained to breaking-point. Sir Henry Wilson records in his Diary that Joffre was "infuriated," and "simply went for Haig," in a manner which, he says, Foch described "as quite brutal," concluding with the assertion that "he would have no further dealings with Haig over this matter, and that Haig must work it out with Foch." This is a gross exaggeration. There was a sharp conflict of opinion, but at no time did either of the two generals lose control of his temper.

Joffre's good sense forced him to realize that Haig was not exceeding his prerogative in deciding for himself the best means of utilizing the forces under his own command. On the main issue—the continued pressure—the two commanders were in complete agreement.

Such heat as had been engendered in the interview cooled down almost as rapidly as it had arisen. Both General Joffre and Haig had far too deep a sense of the magnitude of

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the task confronting them to allow personal divergence of opinion to interfere with a loyal and whole-hearted co-operation.

It is difficult at any time to sum up the full effects of any operation in war—with the possible exception of the final one which results in the collapse of the enemy's resistance and his retreat—but if Haig's view of war is the correct one, then it becomes still more difficult to tabulate the effect of any specific operation. A comparison of casualties—even when the historian has arrived at correct comparative figures—is at best only an indication: it cannot be accepted as the final test. The gain of ground—important factor as it is—may lead to erroneous judgments, for the advantages of territorial gains can always be counteracted to a great extent by the time factor enabling the defensive works to be established to balance the topographical disadvantage. Even more difficult is it to gauge the factor of moral; the repercussions on the mentality of the enemy of an operation, whether successful or unsuccessful, extend far beyond the troops immediately involved. We have to estimate the effect on the commanders, on the will-power of the nations whose armies are involved and on their allies. Even with the detailed knowledge afforded by historical research, the estimation of these various factors can seldom be complete or conclusive, and during the operations themselves even the most efficient and perfect Intelligence Service cannot hope to possess the data available for the historian.

Immediately the battle was over, Haig set his mind on a review of the results which had been attained and their probable effect on the future, so far as this could be judged from the limited information then at his disposal. He summed up his conclusions in a paper which he submitted to the British Government. He pointed out that though the casualties which his army had suffered were great, there was reason to believe that those of the Germans were even higher, that the moral of the enemy troops had shown marked signs of deterioration, while the British Army was confident in its proved superiority in fighting over its foes, that correspondence found on prisoners showed that the effect of the Somme battle



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on the people of Germany was deep, that weather alone had prevented the reaping of the full fruits of victory, and that if the same process of attack were renewed with equal determination as soon as conditions both of weather and of reinforcements permitted there was full justification for the expectation of decisive results.

Although necessarily founded on incomplete data, particularly as regards casualties, yet it is remarkable how the accuracy of the deductions has been confirmed from all the sources which the passage of years has opened up. The views which Haig himself had formed and expressed met with criticism from many sides, and the War Office itself was not fully prepared to accept its estimate. Lord Kitchener's restraining hand and personality were no longer there to curb the eagerness of the civilian critics of the Army in Press and Cabinet and to prevent them from exercising their influence on the conduct of the military operations.

Officers and men, both wounded and on leave in Great Britain, could provide ample details of sufferings endured and of the difficulties of accomplishing the task of winning the war, while they were not in a position to grasp the essential features or to appreciate the strategy of the battle. Although Haig's independence of mind and confidence in his own judgment did not falter in the face of opposition, yet he was fully aware that he was now the object of fierce criticism, and that some of the confidence of the Government in him was shaken.

Long afterwards, when Ludendorff's "War Memories" was published in September, 1919, Haig's mind reverted to the anxious moments of 1916. After a close study of the book it was apparent to him that Ludendorff more than confirmed all that he had said in his review of the effects of the Battle of the Somme. "The strain of this year, 1916," wrote the German Commander, "had proved too great; the endurance of the army had weakened; we were completely exhausted on the western front. . . . In spite of our victory over the Roumanian army we were definitely weaker as regards the position as a whole. . . . September was an especially critical month: it was not made easy for

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us to embark on any operation against Roumania." And he refers to "The plan of the Entente to overwhelm us," as "a plan which, in August and September, had seemed possible of realization."

The final British attack in November he describes as "a particularly heavy blow." "From the middle of November onwards," he writes, "we awaited with great anxiety the further violent attacks on the Somme and at Verdun which our invasion of Roumania was likely to provoke. . . . I was greatly impressed with the seriousness of the position by a tour which I took of the western front in the middle of December."

It was characteristic of Haig that when he read this remarkable testimony from his great adversary he would take no credit to himself when his critics were finally refuted, but at once wrote to the officer who had been Head of the Intelligence at the time to say that never, so far as he was aware, had there been in the history of war so complete a confirmation of an Intelligence estimate. "If there is one man," he said to this officer, "who should be happy to-day it is yourself, whose judgment has been so completely vindicated." Generous though the tribute was to his Staff, it gives a wrong impression. At no time did Haig accept his Staff's opinion untested, and it was Haig's judgment fully as much as that of the Intelligence Staff which had been vindicated by Ludendorff's revelations.

Haig, to the end of his life, maintained that, although the Battle of the Somme had not resulted in the complete and immediate breakdown of German resistance, yet it had achieved results which had justified both the inception and the pursuance to the uttermost of the battle. The German fighting power had been greatly reduced. The wearing-out process was in full course. Our own new armies, both officers and men, had gained experience which was to be of primary service to them in their future battles. They had acquired confidence in their own powers, and they had earned for the British Army, for the first time, the complete confidence and respect of the Allied Leaders.

Nor were the tactical advantages achieved inconsiderable.

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The position which the British forces had reached when the battle came to an end would have been invaluable had the campaigns of the ensuing year taken the course designed for them by Joffre and Haig. Even as it was, the possession of the ground gained, forced the retreat of the enemy during the months of quiet that intervened between the Battle of the Somme and the campaigns of 1917. If greater British forces had been available, Haig held that he could have turned these tactical advantages to account before the Germans would have had the opportunity of making good their withdrawal to a stronger position.

Apart from purely military considerations, Haig considered that a broad view of the international situation proved the necessity of the battle. There had been an agreed plan for the year's campaign for all the Allies. Russia, Italy and Roumania had loyally played their part. France had endured the martyrdom of Verdun. Was Britain to fail, even when the probability of final success in the battle became less? Might not any reluctance to commence the great battle of the year, or any premature breaking-off of the battle, have weakened the faith of the Allies in Great Britain, and endangered the whole outcome of the war? Might not France herself have grown weary of the struggle, in which she would have borne by far the greater share, both of effort and of loss?

This review of the battle must be read in conjunction with Ludendorff's remarkable statement that "I cannot see as I look back how the German General Headquarters could have mastered the situation," if the Allies had continued their blows as they did in 1916. "In 1917," he points out, "the Russian offensive took place two months after the Anglo-French attack." It was not a joint blow: there were two distinct and disconnected attacks, and "from our interior lines we were able to repel and overcome our opponents one by one."

From the moment that the operations on the Somme were over, Haig based his plans and hopes for 1917 on a continuation of the same loyal combination and co-operation between the Allied Commanders-in-Chief and the Allied Govern-

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ments as had prevailed in 1916. Although he knew that criticism was rife, and opinion at home vacillated, yet he continued to urge—though with little grounds left for hoping that his representations would be listened to—that there should be complete concentration on the Western Front. The disclosures of his great adversary Ludendorff confirmed Haig in the view that if the trust and support, promised and given without stint by Lord Kitchener, had been continued in 1917, the bitter experience of the Spring of 1918 and the loss of life in the long-drawn struggle of that year might well have been avoided.

## CHAPTER XVI

### PREPARATIONS FOR 1917

THE Annual Conference of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief with the representatives of those in distant theatres had been held at Chantilly, under the Presidency of General Joffre, in November, 1916, and the plan of operations for the ensuing year had been formulated. In general this plan was a continuation of the battles of 1916—a combined offensive by the French and British in the general area of the Somme, simultaneous with attacks by the Russians and the Italians. The actual date was not fixed. Joffre pressed for an early attack; Haig wished a later date both to perfect his own preparations and to ensure the co-operation of the Russians.

The crux of the decision of the Conference in November, 1916, was, however, that the offensive was to be of a decisive character, and would comprise a series of attacks delivered simultaneously on all fronts. It emphasized the main objectives and the condition on which every plan of operations was to be based. "Since the Anglo-French Front contains the main forces of the enemy Powers, and since it may be the theatre of operations in which decisive results can be reached most rapidly, we should regard it as our principal Front, and declare that the part of our forces allotted to it should not be detached." The general scheme on which the armies were to operate was to be a resumption of operations on the model of the Battle of the Somme. The British armies were to direct their efforts against the front between Bapaume and Vimy, while the French northern group of armies were to attack between the Somme and the Oise. Since the French

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attack had certain local objectives, the British were to transfer the bulk of their forces to the Flanders front, where their offensive was to be continued to the utmost extent possible.

This plan was now to receive a rude check. In Great Britain the Asquith Ministry had fallen, and Mr. Lloyd George had succeeded to power. Lord Derby had taken Lord Kitchener's place as Minister of War, and the cry of "No More Somme Battles" was abroad. The country had expected great and immediate results from the battle of the Somme and full expectations had not been realized. No spectacular progress had been made to appeal to popular imagination, unaided by detailed exposition, and the Government of the day did not encourage official explanations of the results attained. The new Government was uncertain of its position and was anxious for some striking success that it could use as a means of consolidating its own position in the eyes of the nation.

Nor was the position radically different in France. The French people had seen a large portion of their country in the hands of a foreign invader for over twenty-eight months, their army had suffered heavily in casualties, and the progress as measured on the map towards the final defeat and eviction of the Germans was not consoling. Ministries in France are even more susceptible to public opinion than are those in England; they rise and fall with each wave. The French Ministry of that time had undergone many vicissitudes, and, like the British Government, now felt that its continuance in power was dependent on immediate results in the field. The failure of the Roumanian offensive, from which great results had been awaited in France, and the subsequent invasion of Roumania, led not only to the fall of the Briand Ministry, but eventually to the retirement of General Joffre\* and to his replacement by General Nivelle.

Nivelle had attracted attention in the operations of 1916 by a carefully prepared attack with limited objectives on the

\* It was currently reported that a factor which contributed largely to Joffre's supersession was the open expression of his opinion that the great efforts which the French Army had been called on to make while the strength of Great Britain was still developing, had reduced the French Infantry to such a condition that no further great attack could be expected of them.

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Verdun Front, at the time when the Somme Battle had withdrawn every available German unit from Verdun to meet the pressure of the British offensive. He had succeeded in obtaining complete tactical surprise, and gained a considerable local success without heavy casualties to his own troops. These achievements had stirred the imagination of the French people, who were willing to believe that in General Nivelle they had discovered a commander who was in possession of a golden key to success in war. Nivelle himself had encouraged the idea, and had stated publicly that, given power, he would pierce the front of the enemy and win the war.

Lord Kitchener's forceful condemnation of this notion of "piercing the front" has already been quoted, and it is possible that had he survived his influence might have secured the rejection of the scheme and even of its protagonist; but by December, 1916, his restraining hand had been removed, and the civilians were dazzled by a plan that seemed to promise speedy victory. Nivelle was hailed as a second Napoleon and appointed to the Command.

He took over his duties on December 13th, 1916, and immediately got into touch with the British Commander-in-Chief with a view to formulating his plans and obtaining British co-operation for the great offensive which he had in mind for the Spring of 1917. The two Commanders-in-Chief met for the first time on December 20th, when Nivelle expounded his plan. It proved to be a complete reversal of Joffre's and Haig's policy. Instead of a combined French and British attack on the Somme, Nivelle proposed a great attack by the French armies on the Aisne Front.

There was to be a subsidiary attack by the British Army on the Arras Front, using all available resources, and preliminary subsidiary actions on other portions of the French and British Fronts between Arras and Rheims to prevent the enemy moving troops towards the Aisne. When the line had been pierced on the Aisne a third French Army was to exploit the success, and simultaneously there was to be a general advance by the whole Allied Force, driving the Germans back to the Meuse. The whole operation was to take place early in the spring.

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Haig was more than sceptical. He doubted the capacity of the French Army to carry through the gigantic task allotted to it in this programme. He could not believe that the German resistance had sufficiently weakened to allow of the piercing of the line at a single blow. He pointed out to General Nivelle grave objections to his proposals. He admitted the force of Nivelle's argument in favour of an early attack, so that any offensive by the Germans might be forestalled, but he urged that this would make a simultaneous attack by all the Allies impossible—weather conditions alone would prevent an attack by the Russians as early as February.

The concentration of the enormous French force for the Aisne could only be achieved by an extension of the British Front. Haig was prepared to extend his front as far as the Amiens-Villers-Bretonneux Road, but no farther, if he was to undertake a vigorous offensive.

He urged that the transportation service, then almost wholly in the hands of the French Railways, would prove inadequate to deal with the increased work which would be required for so extensive an operation at so early a date in the new year.

These representations to General Nivelle did not constitute the only reason for Haig's distrust of the plan. He knew intimately the area which had been selected by Nivelle for the main French offensive, for he had fought over it in 1914 with the British forces.

He realized that the French Army, powerful as it was in field artillery, was weak in howitzers, which alone could search the ground behind a crest-line.

The experience of the last two years had taught him the difficulties of breaking through an entrenched line on a front sufficiently broad to allow a pursuing army to push through to the enemy's lines of communication. He did not believe that it could be accomplished at a single blow—still less did he believe in the possibility of breaking off an action at the will of the attacker. Unless fully successful there would be inevitable counter-attacks.

The preparations for an attack on the scale designed by Nivelle could not be concealed for an indefinite period, and



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the network of German communications would enable them to assemble their available reinforcements with great rapidity.

On general strategic grounds Haig had equally strong objections, owing to the effect of the plan on the British Army. The strain on British shipping was intense; and the damage done by the German submarines might well make it imperative that the British armies should be utilized for the freeing of the Channel Ports during 1917. British power and fighting capacity must be conserved. The British holding attack planned by Nivelle to be effective would have to be pressed with determination, and would involve very considerable casualties, and a corresponding weakening of British military power. If the Aisne attack failed—and he expected the plan, as it was designed, to fail in obtaining decision—the task of clearing the Belgian coast and ports by an attack in the northern theatre would fall solely on the British. The French infantry (already past the zenith of its strength) would, after an attack such as Nivelle contemplated, be in no condition to render material assistance to any further effort that same year.

Nevertheless, Haig did not feel it his duty to press these objections to their logical conclusion of refusal to co-operate. He still regarded himself as bound by the orders which he had received from the Government when he assumed command—"To co-operate with the French as long as co-operation did not endanger the security of his own force."

Whatever the arguments against the soundness of Nivelle's plan might be, it could not be argued that they endangered British security, except that the failure of any great French attack must result in an additional strain upon the British forces.

Nivelle's plan reduced, rather than increased, the immediate task to be performed by the British Army during this first operation of 1917. Accordingly Haig agreed to recast his plans in conformity with Nivelle's scheme and promised the fullest support that lay in his power.

Although prepared to concur in Nivelle's strategic plan, other serious questions affecting the joint relations of the

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two armies remained unsettled. Of these the most important was the ever-present problem of the relative lengths of front line to be held by British and French respectively. This question gave rise to considerable correspondence between the two Commands.

Throughout the whole period of trench warfare, and even after the appointment of a Generalissimo in 1918, the problem of the line was the source of constant friction between the Headquarters, and had more than once to be referred by the Commanders to their respective Governments. It is not difficult to understand why agreement could not be reached. Neither France nor Britain would willingly see its offensive power weakened by the allotment to its army of an undue proportion of defensive line.

Each Headquarters had its own argument in support of the claim that already it held more than a due share of the line. The French contended that the only fair standard was one of mileage, and wished to divide the whole of the Western Front in arithmetical proportion to the numerical strength of the respective armies.

The British for their part maintained that the "strategic nature," and not the "length" of the front was the truest criterion. By the phrase "strategic nature" they implied topographical features, the density of the hostile troops, and the natural facilities for averting or evading a hostile offensive by manœuvre. In Flanders there was no depth for the manœuvre of troops between the front and the sea coast, and if the seaports were lost, or even seriously threatened, the whole system of communications between Great Britain and France would have to be recast. To illustrate his point Haig had graphs prepared showing the density of the German troops along the whole front.

While determined to uphold the status of the British Army and to reject all efforts made by the French to relegate to it the inactive but costly task of taking over more line and squandering its resources in a defensive operation, Haig did not blind himself to the transition that was taking place in the relative strength of the two armies. The British Army was steadily increasing; that of France had reached—if it had

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not passed—its greatest strength. To meet this change Haig was prepared to take over a due extent of French front, and thus reduce the task of the French armies ; but he was convinced that the future progress of the war would make great demands on the British Army and was determined that his army should be in a position to undertake the task which would be required of it in the forthcoming offensive.

The preliminary meeting between the two Commanders-in-Chief was followed by an interchange of letters, and by the end of the year Haig understood that it had been mutually agreed that (1) offensive operations should start as soon as possible, although no specific day had been mentioned ; (2) the British should complete the relief of the French troops, to the extent agreed to by Haig, by the end of January ; and (3) the whole of the British fighting troops, other than those actually in the line, instead of training for the forthcoming offensive should be relegated to railway construction and the other works necessary to the early commencement of the offensive.

This last concession was only wrung from Haig by strong pressure from the French ; nobody realized more clearly than the British Commander-in-Chief that the success of even the lesser offensives allotted to the British Army by Nivelle depended at least as much upon training as upon the number of troops involved.

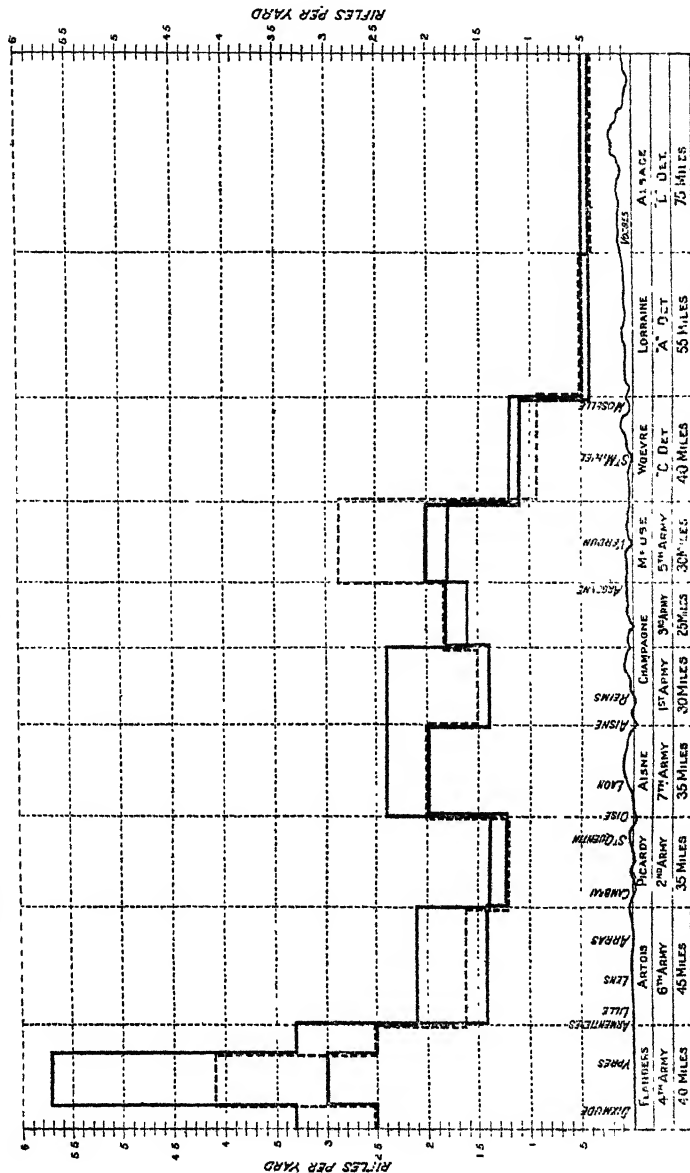
But Nivelle was not satisfied. He desired that a definite date should be fixed for the opening of the joint attack, and, more important still, he pressed for further extension of the British front ; eventually he decided to refer the whole question to the French Government, and thus consequently to the British War Cabinet.

While these discussions were in progress between Nivelle and Haig, very important developments, destined to have far-reaching results on the military operations of the year, were taking place in the Councils of the statesmen of the Allied Powers.

Mr. Lloyd George had shown as soon as he had succeeded to power that he distrusted British military leadership. He criticized publicly and privately the Somme operations ;

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## COMPARATIVE STRENGTH OF THE GERMAN ARMIES ON THE WESTERN FRONT IN 1917



25<sup>th</sup> JULY 1917  
 25<sup>th</sup> SEPT 1917  
 25<sup>th</sup> OCT. 1917

As per German Press 15<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> 1917

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he cast doubts upon the estimated results which were submitted to him both by General Headquarters in France and by the War Office at home. At one of the periodic Conferences between the representatives of the civil governments (which were an outstanding feature of Mr. Lloyd George's regime), held in Rome during the first week of January, 1917, the British Prime Minister is said to have produced a plan for a combined offensive aimed at crossing the Alps and dictating peace to Austria at Vienna. Nobody knows from whom this plan had emanated. No responsible military adviser either in British or French Headquarters has ever sponsored it—even at the Conference of statesmen and vitalized by the magnetic personality of the British Prime Minister it had a dubious reception. The Italians naturally welcomed it, for it put out of all question any danger to their front from the Austrian attack. The French viewed it askance ; they could see no military advantage to be gained, and it did not seem to offer any favourable results from the political point of view in France. Neither Italian nor French ministers were accustomed at this stage of the war to endorse schemes of military operations without careful examination by their respective military experts. Accordingly, even the eloquence of Mr. Lloyd George could not extract from the delegates at the meeting more than the acknowledgment that the ministers were "impressed" by the new proposal, and that they would consult technical opinion on the merits of his plan.\*

On his way back to England from Rome the British Prime Minister met Nivelle, who took advantage of the opportunity to propound his own proposals, involving only subsidiary efforts by the British and the decisive blow by the French, which within forty-eight hours was to pierce the enemy front in sufficient breadth to allow an overwhelming mass of French troops to push through and seize the enemy lines of communication.

A plan of this nature found a ready response from Mr. Lloyd George. Presumably, it appeared to him that the losses on the British side would be comparatively light, while

\* See Sir W. Robertson : "Soldiers and Statesmen."

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the rapid results ensuing would give additional prestige to the new Government.\*

Nivelle was invited to proceed to London to explain his plan in detail to the War Cabinet.

On January 15th the Cabinet met in London and was attended by the two Commanders-in-Chief. Here Nivelle expounded his plan in considerable detail.

In marked contrast to Haig, who never acquired the art of lucid verbal explanation of his plans, and who at times was almost inarticulate, Nivelle had great—for a soldier exceptional—gifts of exposition.

He spoke fluent English; he was ready to make great promises. It is doubtful whether any of the British Cabinet possessed sufficient knowledge of military affairs to test these promises and to judge how far they were capable of fulfilment, and Nivelle appears to have experienced little difficulty in converting them to his view.

The conclusions of the Conference were not very definite, but they included a decision that a further portion of the French line should be taken over by the British as far as the Amiens-Roye Road, some twenty miles farther south of the point to which Haig had agreed. It was further arranged that the general offensive should start not later than April 1st; and, most important of all, it was resolved that: "The general dispositions for the offensive should conform to 'directives' from the French Council of War, and that these were only to be modified in case a new German attack on the Western Front should interfere with their inception." All other details were left to the two Commanders-in-Chief.

In Haig's view, the British Cabinet did not even devote consideration to the arguments which he advanced, nor attempt to support him in any way. A paper prepared by the French General Headquarters was submitted, which gave the total number of French Divisions as 99, with a strength of 7,700 per division, and made no mention of the ten

\* To the French Government of the day—also politically insecure—the scheme was attractive in that the glory of delivering the final blow for victory would fall to France. They welcomed a plan which gave promise of a decisive blow to be delivered by French troops, and the consequent glamour accruing to the French nation, and indirectly to themselves.

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Territorial divisions or the already increased strength of the existing divisions, and the British Cabinet accepted the French view, giving as additional reasons for their compliance :

1. That we had refused to send more divisions to Salonika.
2. That we were fighting on French soil.
3. That the French army was larger than our own.

Crises in great wars under modern conditions occur as often in the council chamber as in the battlefields : battles may be won or lost as readily by the decisions of statesmen on the distribution of resources in man-power and material as by the misdirection of the forces by the military leaders in the field.

It is impossible to overrate the importance of the decisions reached at this meeting on January 15th ; it led directly to the Calais Conference in the following month, which in turn—but for the steadfastness of Haig—would almost inevitably have involved the British Army in irretrievable disaster.

Haig's misgivings as to the effect of the loss of Lord Kitchener from the Cabinet were already being realized. It was manifest to Haig that the British Cabinet now reposed greater confidence in French leadership than in their own soldiers, that in any issue that might be referred to the decision of the Government the British view would not find ready support. It was already, in fact though not in name, no longer co-operation between allied leaders, but subordination of the British Command to French leadership. It was with grave forebodings, which were soon to be realized, that Haig returned to his Headquarters to seek to carry out loyally the directions he had received.

However unsatisfactory might be the relationship between Haig and his Government, and between Haig and Nivelle, on the actual battlefield there were indications that the situation was steadily improving. Ever since the Somme battle had reached its zenith it had been noticed that the Germans were preparing defensive lines far in rear of their front line. From prisoners, from captured documents and from Secret Service sources, evidence of a steady loss of moral both in the

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German Army and in the German nation had been accumulating. Certain units were reported to have shown a marked disinclination to go into the battle line; from our own commanders in the front line there came a steady flow of reports that the fighting qualities of the Germans were beginning to show signs of deterioration. From Germany itself arrived reports of a peace movement, promoted by a growing national opposition to the sacrifice of the whole of Germany's youth. Already prisoners' pay-books showed that boys born in 1898—not yet eighteen years of age—were in the front-line trenches, and this not only gives some indication of the toll which had been exacted by the Somme, but also constitutes the justification of Haig's argument that a continuation of the wearing-down policy would have finally extinguished the "will to fight" of the German nation.

To these encouraging signs now had to be added definite indications that the Germans were preparing to withdraw on a large sector of their front embracing the point of junction of the French and British armies.

However satisfactory to the Allies such a withdrawal might be as evidence of an increasing caution in Germany, if it preceded the actual attack by the Allies as planned by Nivelle it might have grave results. It would shorten the German line, and thereby set free more troops to oppose the Allied advance; it might sterilize the British blow if any portion of the front attacked should be found weakly held or even evacuated.

There was once again a sharp divergence of opinion between the British and French Intelligence Services. The view of the British Intelligence Service—accepted by Haig—was that withdrawal was imminent; the French were not prepared to agree.

To meet the altered circumstances Haig decided to extend his attack so as to include the Vimy Ridge, immediately north of the Arras Front, which the German retirement did not effect. Nivelle challenged the wisdom of this proposal, and disagreement between the two Commanders (which the meeting of the 15th January had sought to dissipate) again became acute, and was accentuated by a serious breakdown of



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the French railway system behind the British front, requiring the employment of an ever-increasing number of British fighting troops to make good its deficiencies.

Haig, who saw the success of the impending operation jeopardized by the railway problem, reported his difficulties to the War Office in London and to the Government, and received in reply a summons to attend a Conference with the Prime Minister at Calais.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CALAIS CONFERENCE

TO the historians of all time the Calais Conference will always be the high-water mark of ineptitude of civilian interference with the conduct of military operations. It has no parallel in history. All British military advice was deliberately discarded. The British Government through its responsible head decided to commit the fortunes of the armies in the forthcoming campaign, and the fate of the nation, to the plan of an allied Commander-in-Chief which had received no support from our military advisers, and which was already the object of sharp criticism from many leading French soldiers. At the same time it decided to abrogate the carefully formulated protective clauses of the original instructions prepared by the British Cabinet and issued by Lord Kitchener at the outbreak of the war, when the British Army was insignificant in comparison with the Army of its Ally. It did this at a time when the British Army was rapidly becoming the most important factor, numerically and morally, in the Allied force in France, and when, moreover, it had already shown its mettle in the great battles of 1916. It took no account of the reputation of the Commander-in-Chief of its own Army or of the experience he had gained by his thirteen months of chief command.

Bemused by the eloquent exposition of a new and untried foreign commander, it was prepared to entrust to him the whole future of the British Empire. Even had success crowned the venture, it could not have escaped criticism; but from the outset the possibility of success was remote. In the end the plan to which the British Cabinet committed itself brought disaster to the armies of our allies, and jeopardized

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the success of the whole Allied cause. The action of the Cabinet in February, 1917, was indeed the direct cause of the prolonged and costly fighting at Passchendaele in the Autumn of the same year.

Yet the Calais Conference, with its disastrous results, was the logical outcome of the fundamental error made at the meeting in London on January 15th. The nebulous decisions of that meeting afforded no permanent system of command. Unless they were partly abandoned or reversed there could be no resting-place between "conformity to the directions of the French Commander-in-Chief" and complete subordination.

Ostensibly the conference at Calais was to adjust the difficulties in the transportation service, which had arisen in the French Railway system behind the British lines, and which had been brought to notice by Haig. Actually it was with a far wider intention that the British Prime Minister set out for Calais.

Immediately before his departure a meeting of the War Cabinet had been held in London. Robertson, the responsible military adviser of the War Cabinet, has left on record that he received a definite instruction from the Secretary of the Cabinet that his attendance at the meeting was unnecessary. If the War Cabinet, then consisting of Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Curzon, Mr. A. Henderson and Lord Milner, knew anything of the Prime Minister's intention, it must be assumed that it was at this meeting that the matter was discussed and the decision taken; but at the time of the meeting Sir W. Robertson was unaware whether the War Cabinet had prior to the conference given the Prime Minister full authority for the action which he took at this momentous meeting.\*

On February 21st the conference met at Calais. Mr. Lloyd George was accompanied by General Robertson and Col. Hankey (the Secretary of the Cabinet); M. Briand brought with him General Lyautey (the French War Minister) and General Nivelle; Haig had with him General Kiggell, his Chief of Staff.

\* "Soldiers and Statesmen," II., pages 212-16.

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Although prior to the Conference Haig believed that only the problem of the transportation service was to be discussed, he had taken with him, as on all his journeys, a fairly complete set of documents and maps of his own front. He soon discovered that the conference was not prepared to devote much time to the transportation question. After a very short discussion—less than an hour—the British Prime Minister, who was presiding, curtly said that the matter would be left to the experts, and then he called on Nivelle to expound again his plan for the ensuing campaign.

Nivelle had little fresh to say, but he emphasized the satisfactory accord which now existed between the British and French Staffs.

“The plan,” said Nivelle, “requires no further discussion.”

According to an account given shortly after the meeting by one who was present, Mr. Lloyd George then broke in with the remark that this was not a complete statement, and asked Nivelle to suppress nothing about any difficulties between him and the British Field-Marshal.

Nivelle appeared to be taken aback at this request, and replied at once that there was never any disagreement, with the single exception of the arrangements for the attack near Arras, and in this particular he did not know exactly why Haig had not fallen in with his suggestions.

Haig then gave his views, and produced the maps prepared by his Intelligence Department showing the information at his disposal, which had led him to regard the withdrawal of the Germans from the Sambre Front as imminent. He explained in detail why he considered it necessary that his attack should include the Vimy position—a proposal which had met with Nivelle's opposition.

A small operation by the British on the 17th February astride the Ancre had secured direct observation over the upper Ancre valley. A week later the enemy had withdrawn on a front of ten miles. Haig considered it possible that this withdrawal was not merely a local evacuation of a difficult position, but was the preliminary move in a great retreat to the carefully prepared Hindenburg line. If this were so, any

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attack which did not include the Vimy Ridge would, Haig contended, be a blow in the air.

General Lyautey expressed general agreement with Haig's views, and Mr. Lloyd George adjourned the session with the request that the French would draw up their proposals for a system of command before dinner—that is to say, within the next hour and a quarter.

Immediately dinner was over the document, with a detailed scheme of organization for the Allied Headquarters, was produced.

The document was in French, and an essential clause in it may be translated as follows: "The British War Cabinet, with the consent of the French War Cabinet, and in order to ensure unity of command on the Western Front, delegates to the French Commander-in-Chief, from 1st March, 1917, authority over the British forces operating on the Western Front in everything concerning the conduct of operations, and especially: (1) The plan and the execution of offensive and defensive operations. (2) The grouping of the forces in arms and in groups of arms. (3) The limits between armies and groups of armies. (4) The distribution of war material and war resources of all kinds between the two armies." The proposal included a British Chief of the General Staff, who should be located at French General Headquarters, to issue Nivelle's instructions to the British Commander-in-Chief, and would have under him a Staff, comprising both General Staff Officers and Officers of the Quartermaster-General's Department. All questions of personnel and of discipline were to be dealt with by British Commander-in-Chief and the War Office, and finally, in the event of the present French Commander-in-Chief being replaced by another, the powers now entrusted to Nivelle would pass automatically to his successor. The arrangement was to hold good until the War Cabinets of both England and France united in reversing the decision of the Calais Conference.

The full significance of this astonishing proposal requires careful study and analysis. The British Commander-in-Chief in the field was to be retained, but his duties were to be restricted to control of the Adjutant-General's branch. He

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was deprived of all decision in operations. The whole of the veteran army, which had been engaged in France during the past two years, and also the new armies, prepared under Lord Kitchener's scheme and at this time just reaching their full development, were to be placed immediately and completely under French higher control.

Shortly after the production of this document Haig and Robertson went together to Mr. Lloyd George's room, whither they had been invited, and there the British Prime Minister told them that as the French Army was still greater than the British, although this would be the last great battle in which they would have this superiority, it was the definite wish of the War Cabinet that the British should be placed under the French Commander-in-Chief's orders.

He then asked Haig for his views, and Haig bluntly replied that it would be folly to place the British under the French in the method suggested, and that he did not believe that the British would fight under direct French leadership. With this opinion Mr. Lloyd George appeared to agree, and he directed Robertson and Haig to draw up jointly a workable scheme of command, retaining the salient principles that the control of operations for the approaching battle would rest solely in the hands of the French Commander-in-Chief, and that the British Army would be under his orders.

Haig declined to be a party to this task. He regarded the Cabinet and its responsible military advisers as the proper channel for the rules governing the actions of the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces. He had registered his opinion that the plan to place the British Army under direct French control on the eve of a great offensive was fraught with grave risk. Now he considered it his duty to stand aside and await the final instructions of the Cabinet. He maintained the principle that it was not for the Commander-in-Chief to cavil at the orders of the Cabinet and their military advisers.

However unwise the plan of the Cabinet, it was acting within its constitutional rights, and it only remained for the

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Commander-in-Chief to execute its orders, or, if these were impossible to fulfil, to ask to be relieved of his command.

Both he and Robertson were bitterly disappointed with the decision attributed to the War Cabinet.

"We were agreed," said Haig, "that we would not continue to hold our present positions if it were finally decided that the British Army should serve directly under French command. We were profoundly dissatisfied with our Government."

In the early hours of the following morning, General Lyautey asked Haig to come to his room, and there he found Nivelle in Lyautey's company. Both the French Generals spoke of the insult offered to Haig and to the British Army, and both assured Haig that they had not seen the document until recently; Lyautey, indeed, declared that he had not seen it before entering the train at Paris, and Haig formed the impression that the paper had been drawn up in Paris with the approval of Lloyd George and Briand.

A little later in the day the Prime Minister gave Haig the solution of the problem in the form of a paper drawn up by General Robertson.

In its original form this paper divided the forthcoming operations into two definite periods:

- (a) Prior to the battle.
- (b) During the battle.

In the first period Haig was to conform to Nivelle's instructions, but was authorized to disregard them if the situation required and if the Army was endangered. During the battle he was to act entirely under Nivelle's orders.

Haig immediately objected to this latter clause, and claimed that he should have a free hand to choose the means whereby British troops in the sector of front allotted to them should perform their task, and to this Mr. Lloyd George eventually agreed.\*

At 11.30 in the morning the conference met in session again, and subsequent discussion was limited to matters of detail.

\* It will be remembered that this point had already arisen in the Battle of the Somme (see p. 224), and it was again to arise when Foch was Generalissimo in August, 1918 (see p. 350).

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The document to which the conference finally attached their signatures comprised the following principal points :

(1) Whereas the primary object of the forthcoming military operations is to drive the enemy from French soil, and whereas the French Army disposes of larger effectives than the British, the British War Cabinet recognizes that the general direction of the campaign should be in the hands of the French Commander-in-Chief.

(2) With this object in view, the British War Cabinet engages itself to direct the Field-Marshal Commanding the British Expeditionary Force to conform his plans of operation to the general strategical plans of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army.

(3) The British War Cabinet further engages itself to direct that during the period intervening between the date of the signature of this agreement and the date of the commencement of the operation referred to in paragraph (1), the Field-Marshal Commanding the British Expeditionary Force shall conform his preparations to the views of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, except in so far as he considers that this would endanger the safety of his Army or prejudice its success, and, in any case where Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig may feel bound on these grounds to depart from General Nivelle's instructions, he shall report the action taken, together with the reasons for such action, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, for the information of the British War Cabinet.

(4) The British War Cabinet further engages itself to instruct the Field-Marshal Commanding the British Expeditionary Force that after the date of the commencement of the forthcoming operations referred to in paragraph (1), and up to the termination of these operations, he shall conform to the orders of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army in all matters relating to the conduct of the operations, it being understood that the British Commander will be left free to choose the means he will employ and the methods of utilizing his troops in that sector of operations allotted to him by the French Commander-in-Chief in the original plan.

(5) The British War Cabinet and Government and the French Government, each so far as concerns its own Army, will be the judge of the date at which the operations referred to in paragraph (1) are to be considered at an end. When so ended the arrangements in force before the commencement of the operations will be re-established.

It requires no expert military knowledge to realize the full import of this extraordinary settlement—agreed to, if not indeed inspired, by the British Prime Minister and



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the British War Cabinet. It handed over its Armies, tied and bound, to the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of a foreign nation. This man was not, as was ultimately the case in 1918, one who was dissociated from the active command of his own national Army, but he was, in fact, to occupy the dual position of direct command of the French Army combined with indirect control of the British forces.

Indeed, Nivelle was himself still nominally subordinated to Joffre, who retained a general responsibility to the French Cabinet for the whole of the French Army in all theatres of war. While Nivelle was thus to have direct and absolute control not only of the French Army on the Western Front, but also of the British forces in that area, he was himself apparently to be subject to Joffre, who, in turn, was directly responsible to, and would receive orders from the French Cabinet.

The British War Cabinet absolved itself from responsibility (as is the habit of committees in control of important operations) by the proviso that the British Commander still remained responsible for the safety and success of his own troops, and gave him the right of reference to itself should he be impelled to depart from the instructions of the French Commander-in-Chief.

The British War Cabinet thus placed itself in an impregnable position with regard to possible criticism in Parliament or in the country at large. If the campaign succeeded all credit would be claimed, on the ground that the War Cabinet had brought about the arrangements essential to success; if it ended in failure, the politicians could at once disclaim all responsibility, on the score that prior to the failure Haig should have taken advantage of the loophole that was provided for him. The provision that each War Cabinet reserved to itself the right of deciding for its own Army the date on which these arrangements expired is even more extraordinary. At any stage in the battle a situation might have arisen when the French Commander-in-Chief considered himself in a position to direct the British Army, and would be supported in his contention by his Cabinet, while the British

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leader was maintaining, and again with the concurrence of his Government, that he was absolved from the necessity of obedience to his colleague's orders; moreover, such a state of affairs might well come about during the most critical stage of the campaign, and might even jeopardize its slight chance of success. The exact genesis of the proposal is even now unknown. During the anxious night intervening between the two meetings of the conference at Calais, General Robertson received an assurance from Lyautey, the French Minister of War, a man of unimpeachable honour and rectitude, that he knew nothing about the proposal until the document was given to him immediately before the conference.

The published papers of Nivelle include a report from a French officer attached to the British War Office, in which he states that on the 15th February he had had a conversation with the British Prime Minister, when the latter had expressed his complete confidence in Nivelle, and had said that he, and he alone, was capable of bringing the war to a successful conclusion.

It is probable, though not certain, that the view which Haig entertained of the origin of the document was correct: that it was drawn up in Paris, with the cognizance of both Mr. Lloyd George and M. Briand.

Nor should it be forgotten that it was not the two Prime Ministers only who desired the subordination of the British Army to French leadership. The British nation are ever prone to depreciation of their own servants and their own capacity: the characteristics of the French are the reverse.

The whole trend of thought at the War Office in pre-War days had been towards an implicit faith in the superiority of French leadership. Wilson was a frank and avowed exponent of the doctrine. The fact that in 1914 the actual war experience of living British soldiers was far greater than that of the French was discounted or forgotten. It had been a commonplace of the Press and Politics to disparage British military science. Habits of mind acquired in peace are not readily readjusted in the pressure of war. The strict control exercised over the British Press during the war had prevented

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complete knowledge of the actual achievements of the British troops. Good taste had dictated a right and proper reserve about the errors in French leadership ; policy had required the veiling of the ever-increasing weakness of the French moral.

In France each one of these factors was reversed. It was the considered and proper policy of the French authorities to extol the performance of their own troops and leaders.\* Any other course would have ended in prompt convulsion in politics and in the army. The nation firmly believed in its own superiority. The leaders knew what the French people did not fully appreciate—that the inevitable pressure of war was resulting in a weakening of their fighting power, while that of Great Britain with its vast resources was still increasing.

It was natural and even laudable that among both leaders and public in France there should have arisen a desire for the control of the British forces. Nor was it altogether remarkable that there should have been some reflection of this in certain quarters of Great Britain. The suggestion that an "amalgam" of British and French units in the same divisions should be formed under French leadership, was propounded in France and met with the support of a section of the British Press, and even of influential members of the Government, apart from the Prime Minister himself.

Mr. Lloyd George, as early as September, 1916,† when the Somme battle was still at its height, and when he himself was Secretary of State for War, had asked General Foch at Dury his opinion of the efficiency of the British leader and his staff ; and had not concealed his preference for placing the British force under French leadership.

A year later he was to give public expression in forcible terms to a diametrically opposite opinion,‡ and a few months after that he was to claim, with incomplete justification, the chief credit for the appointment of Foch as Generalissimo.

\* The recently published book, " Britain and the War," by General Huguet, is an admirable example of this.

† Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, " Life and Diaries," Vol. I., page 292.

‡ Hansard.

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When the final decision of the Calais Conference was presented to Haig he was faced with the personal problem of whether to seek to execute its provisions, or to ask to be relieved of his command. Severe though the blow was to his pride at seeing himself—a Field-Marshal, with over a year's experience of independent command—placed under a junior and comparatively untried officer with no experience of independent command in the field, he did not allow any personal considerations to influence his judgment.

The problem was what was best for his country, for the Army and for his cause. Whatever might be the opinion of the Prime Minister, Haig knew beyond any possibility of doubt that he possessed the confidence of the Army to an extent which no other Commander-in-Chief—least of all one succeeding him at the present crisis—could hope to achieve.

There were those about him who pointed out that his resignation might result in the abandonment of the Calais Conference policy—even in the resignation of the Prime Minister. Haig would have none of it. In his opinion the servants of the State were under no circumstances justified in seeking to overthrow a constitutional civil authority, least of all in a time of national crisis, when any dislocation might have grave results on the fortunes of the country.

He was convinced that Nivelle's plan would prove a failure, but he was equally convinced that he and he alone of British soldiers could restrict the resulting ill-effects.

The only saving clause in the conference decision was the proviso that the rearrangement of responsibility was not permanent, but was to terminate with the Nivelle battle. Unless his judgment as to the outcome of that battle was at fault, within a few months the present policy must be revised, and the British Commander-in-Chief, whether himself or another, would be restored to a more correct position, with probably even greater freedom than he had previously enjoyed. If he could tide over the dangerous interregnum without disaster the British Army would still in the end achieve victory, and Haig was profoundly convinced that he, better than any other, could direct the

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Army through the critical weeks and months that lay ahead.

With these considerations in his mind, he attached his name to the historic document—not in token of agreement with its terms, but as a sign that he was prepared to accept it and abide by it.

A document thus hastily and loosely drawn up could not be expected to meet the hard test of war without amendment and alteration. Within a month it had broken down. Nivelle took full advantage of the lack of precise definition of the scope of his authority: his letters became dictatorial in tone; he sought to interfere in detail with the battle plans of the British. There were indications that French thought was again turning to a proposal to incorporate British units in French formations under the direct command of French subordinate officers.

Haig's apprehension increased. He was still responsible for the security and integrity of the British Army in France. By the Calais Conference, indeed, the British Government had divorced themselves from any direct responsibility, and Haig stood alone as guardian of the welfare of the Army and the honour of his country, and yet deprived of the means of carrying out his task.

He reopened the question with the Home Authorities, and at a further meeting in London on March 13th, between the two Cabinets and the two Commanders-in-Chief, succeeded in obtaining important modifications. At this Conference it was agreed that:

“(1) The French Commander-in-Chief will only communicate with Authorities of British Army through the British Commander-in-Chief. Excepted are relations between the neighbouring Armies and the present duties of the French Mission.

“(2) The British Commander-in-Chief to furnish information as to operation orders and information as to execution thereof. Neighbouring units to communicate operation orders as customary.

“(3) All British troops in France remain under orders of their own Chiefs and Commander-in-Chief. If independent action on part of British Army is requested, British Commander-in-Chief will do his utmost to comply. Force so detached may, while detached, receive direct operation orders from French.”

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The relationship with the British Mission at French General Headquarters was defined in a formal written agreement :

“ All instructions and communications to Sir Douglas Haig to be signed by Nivelle, except in absence or emergency, when French Chief of Staff or head of British Mission, acting by delegation, may sign.”

To this document Haig attached his signature, but added the important proviso :

“ That while I am fully determined to carry out the Calais agreement in spirit and letter, the British Army and its Commander-in-Chief will be regarded by General Nivelle as Allies and not as subordinates, except during the particular operations which he explained at the Calais Conference. Further, while I also accept the agreement respecting the functions of the British Mission at French Headquarters, it should be understood that these functions should be subject to modification as experience shows to be necessary.”\*

There remained only the question of the appointment of the Head of the British Mission at French General Headquarters.

This appointment, though it did not involve executive duties, was obviously one which would give the holder great influence both at the two Headquarters and in London. Haig had been promised that no officer unacceptable to him would be selected, but the appointment was to be made by the War Office—if not indeed by the War Cabinet—and Haig was pressed to accept Sir Henry Wilson. From many points of view this choice had, indeed, much to recommend it. Wilson had an unrivalled knowledge of French character ; he had proved himself able to smooth over difficulties between the British and French both before the war and in the earlier days of the campaign. He, more than anybody else in Great Britain, had been responsible for the original plans of mobilization and for the concentration of the British forces in France. On the other hand, it could not be said that at this period he possessed Haig's confidence, and certainly not the confidence of Haig's Staff. Haig appreciated Wilson's power of rapidly assimilating information ; his wonderful memory ; his powers of interpreting a military

\* “ Soldiers and Statesmen,” pp. 224-25.

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problem in terms that were easily understood and that carried conviction to civilians ; but he had an inherent distrust of Wilson's judgment. He could not forget that in almost all the problems on which they had worked together—whether they were connected with Ireland, pre-war plans, or the probable German action during the war—Wilson's conclusions and his own had rarely coincided. Nor could Haig fail to remember that both in peace and war Wilson had shown a predilection for intrigue, an instinct that was entirely foreign to Haig's own nature, and unlikely to tend to improve the strained relations between himself and the British Prime Minister.

On March 12th Haig had a long interview with Wilson, and decided that it would be best to trust him with the reorganization of a mission to French General Headquarters. With Haig a decision of this nature once made was irrevocable. Further interviews took place between Haig and Wilson, all of them redounding to the high credit of both men. There was complete frankness. Wilson made no attempt to conceal his knowledge that neither Robertson nor Haig would, under ordinary circumstances, have desired him to hold such an appointment. He himself records that he went the length of advising Haig against his own appointment, but Haig's mind was made up.

Wilson required from Haig an assurance that he would receive Haig's complete confidence, and to this stipulation the Commander-in-Chief at once agreed. According to his Diary he was at the same time exposed to a temptation which must, to one of his mentality, have been very strong. He was convinced that Lloyd George wished to oust Haig, and a group of Members of the House of Commons even approached him with the request that he himself should seek to succeed Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Wilson stated to Haig that he believed that if he wished he could have him removed ; but both men fully realized the grave dangers involved in the terms of the Calais Conference, and both put the interests of the country before every personal end or aim.

Wilson would have been quite prepared then to go on

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half-pay rather than accept the proffered appointment, but Haig impressed on him the duty of acceptance, and in the end Wilson was nominated as Head of the British Mission to French General Headquarters. It is a pleasure to record that any misgivings which Haig may have entertained of Wilson's loyalty were never realized. During the whole period that Wilson occupied the position he was scrupulously loyal and correct in all his dealings with Haig and with the War Office.

Two months later, when the wheel had come full circle, when the fruits of the Calais Conference had yielded their harvest of disasters, Wilson appears to have thought that he had lost some of Haig's confidence. He wrote a long letter explaining his reasons, and regretting that Haig had not consulted with him fully of late. Haig's answer was incisive in its phrasing. He told Wilson not to be a fool. He invited him to come and spend the night at General Headquarters, and added that the only reason for not asking him before was to avoid interference with what was, in Haig's view, Wilson's immediate and more important task, namely, to get the French to agree to the relief of the farther portion of the British line.\*

It is perhaps during these months of deep anxiety to Haig, when the British cause seemed to be in jeopardy owing to the Prime Minister's decisions, and when his own position was no longer secure, that Haig's character shows at its finest. From the day of the death of Lord Kitchener, Haig had anticipated friction in his dealings with the Cabinet. The doctrine which he most dreaded and which had been temporarily in abeyance—the side-show policy—was bound to reappear. Mr. Lloyd George's transference to the War Office in succession to Lord Kitchener had been rapidly followed by his indiscretion at Dury (see p. 252), which had been promptly reported to Haig.

Shortly after the fall of Mr. Asquith's Government and Mr. Lloyd George's accession to power, Haig's Chief of Staff had had an interview with the Prime Minister, and on his return reported to Haig that the Prime Minister had

\* Wilson's "Life and Diaries," p. 352.



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repeated his statement that the British Army had not accomplished much ; that the Somme losses had been useless ; and that the country would not stand more. Mr. Lloyd George, reported the Chief of Staff, had said that a soft point in the German defences must be found, and that point would not be found in the West.

Reports from Paris indicated that M. Briand had now come to share Mr. Lloyd George's outlook. On the other hand, Haig's views received support from unexpected, but none the less influential quarters. Lord Northcliffe, who visited General Headquarters in the early days of January, 1917, told Haig that he had already warned Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Milner that he would withdraw the support of the whole of the Northcliffe Press if any proposal was made to scatter the British forces in the Balkans. Northcliffe went further and said that he believed that it was in his power to bring similar pressure to bear on the French Government ; he was about to interview Clemenceau, and he was ready to urge on him the necessity of the downfall of the Briand Government. Neither Mr. Lloyd George nor M. Briand could afford to ignore a threat of such formidable opposition, and Haig, although he took no part in countenancing any Press campaign, was greatly reassured.

It would appear probable that the British Prime Minister was never completely convinced that Haig at this period was not making common cause with Lord Northcliffe ; for a few weeks later when, for the first and only time during the war, Haig granted interviews to some foreign correspondents the Prime Minister's resentment knew no bounds. It looked at one time as if he was going to make a trivial incident the occasion for Haig's recall. When we look back over the period of time which has elapsed, at the reports of the interviews which appeared in *The Times* of the 15th February, 1917, one can only be amazed at the excitement which was evoked both in Parliament and in the Cabinet. In the interviews themselves Haig said nothing that was not justified by events. The correspondents had asked for a message which would restore confidence in the French public shaken by the disaster on the Aisne, and Haig had allowed his own personal

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view of the ultimate issue of the war to be apparent. He had spoken to the correspondents in terms which he had often used in conversation with other visitors. Haig at the time commented : " I frequently receive eminent visitors at my Headquarters : on such occasions I talk platitudes and state my confidence in the successful issue of the war."

The intervention of Lord Balfour in the Cabinet and Lord Northcliffe in the Press allayed the agitation, and the incident was soon forgotten.

A few weeks later Haig was for once aroused from his customary equanimity, when General Nivelle, secure at the time in the confidence both of the French and British Governments, allowed himself to overstep the strict terms of the agreement which had been concluded at Calais, and addressed to Haig a letter couched in dictatorial terms, and ending with the expression of a " desire " that certain appointments should be made within the British Army. Haig's resentment was intense. It was, he declared, a letter which no gentleman could have written, and one which certainly no Commander-in-Chief of a British army could have received without protest. Haig remarked bitterly that it was hard not only to have to fight the enemy in the field but also to be in conflict with one's allies and one's own country. But his level judgment soon reasserted itself, and he contented himself with sending home a full account of the Calais Conference. He desired to conform to the wishes of the Government in every particular, and therefore did not suggest resignation, because any change in command might be of disadvantage to the Army ; yet he realized that the War Cabinet might think otherwise and wish to replace him by someone in whom they had more confidence. If such were the case, Haig asked that the change should be made forthwith, as hostilities were impending at an early date, and the change must be effected before their commencement. His one object at this great crisis of his nation's history was to serve his King and Country wherever his services could be best utilized. The reply which he received fortified him in his resolution to retain his command and make head against the difficulties which surrounded him.

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Early in March he took a few days' leave, and in London he found to his relief that even members of the Cabinet were agreed that the Government had treated him disgracefully, and that, whatever might be the private wishes of the Prime Minister, the last thing that the Government as a whole desired was Haig's resignation of his Command. To those who gave him this comforting assurance, Haig replied that, although he was fully alive to the insults that had been heaped on him, he had neither any ill-will against any of them nor did he desire any reward, and that if they had anyone more suitable to put in his position he would resign without causing any trouble or loss of prestige.

Later, during the same visit, he was bidden to a reception at the French Embassy to meet General Lyautey. The French Ambassador seemed to go out of his way to make amends to Haig—even going the length of accompanying him to the door on his departure. "I left the Embassy," said Haig, "feeling that I had shown great forbearance."

Haig's anxiety about the forthcoming operations of the French was in no way diminished. He noted that certain members of the French Government were desirous of forbidding the French offensive altogether, but that after a hard struggle Nivelle had gained the day. Under such circumstances the chances of success were decreased. "It indicates," Haig said, "the instability of the French, and if things go badly Nivelle will lose his command."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE BATTLES OF THE SPRING OF 1917

WHILE the controversies generated by the Calais Conference were engaging the attention of the statesmen and their military advisers at home, and distracting the minds of the Commanders in the field, the fighting forces themselves were preparing for sterner tasks. The great drama of the battlefield was developing with intense rapidity. The retreat of the Germans to the Hindenburg Line, commenced in the middle of February, was completed during March, and the beginning of April found them firmly ensconced in that most formidable fortress position.

Nivelle's plan had now matured; the British were to attack from the Arras front on the 9th April, and a few days later the great and decisive blow by the French was to pierce the German line. On the appointed day Haig struck with the III Army under Allenby and the I Army under Horne.

General Allenby was allotted four army corps for his task, and the cavalry division was held in readiness lest opportunity for its employment should occur. On General Allenby's left the Canadian Corps, forming part of the I Army, under General Horne, were entrusted with the task of capturing the Vimy Ridge.

The attack had many new features. The deep cellars and underground passages of Arras had been developed into a great series of "waiting-rooms," where large forces could be concentrated unseen and comparatively immune from German artillery fire. The attack was designed to take the form of a series of short advances to each successive system of hostile defence, and as each stage was reached there was to be a pause

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to enable the troops for the further advance to be reorganized. Tanks were freely used to assist the infantry.

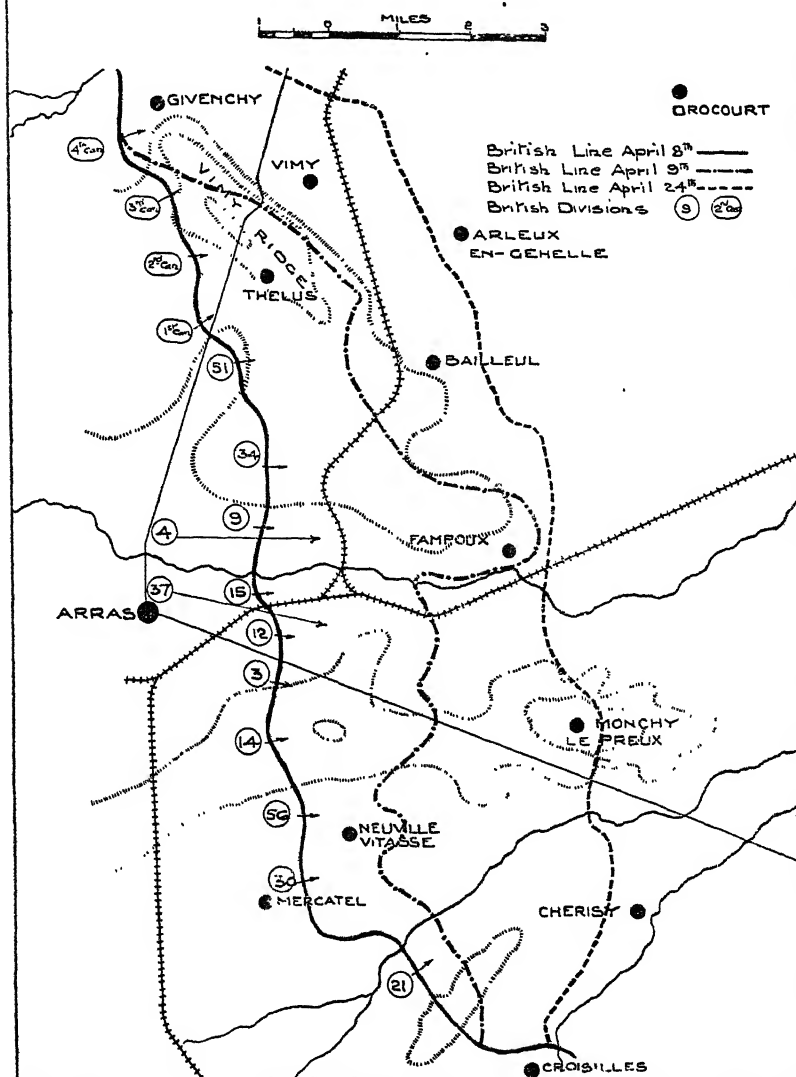
At 5.30 on the morning of April 9th the attack burst over the German trenches, and within forty minutes the whole front line had been taken. At 7.30 and again at noon further advances were launched, and by nightfall the British Army was established deep in the enemy's position—his last completed line of defence had been breached, and the Vimy Ridge was in our hands. It was, as Haig described it, "a most striking success." But the object of the attack was not merely the capture of ground: it was mainly to draw to the British front such German reserves as might otherwise have been occupied in opposing the French attack which was due to start on the 14th. For four more days, therefore, the attack was pressed on, and after six days' fighting the whole German front had been rolled back four miles farther east on an approximately twenty-mile front. Farther south the IV and V British armies, under General Rawlinson and General Gough, had co-operated with minor attacks. It was at this stage that the British attack, according to the original plans of General Nivelle, should have stopped, and the great French assault on the Aisne been delivered: but weather conditions had caused the French attack to be postponed, and in order to accomplish his task of pinning down the German troops, Haig directed attacks on the Arras front to be renewed successively on the 23rd, 24th and 28th April, and on the 3rd May.

On the 16th April, the great French offensive was launched on the Aisne; although the troops advanced with the utmost gallantry and determination, the attack totally failed to achieve even its first objectives. The losses of the French Army were enormous; but even worse than the loss of men was the ill effect on the moral of the French troops. It was renewed on several successive days, but still without success.

The French failure on the Aisne in sharp contrast with the striking success at Arras made a kaleidoscopic change in Haig's position. Distrusted, discredited and subjected to indignities by the Cabinet in February and March, when disaster threatened, statesmen of France and Britain alike now turned to Haig for advice and strength.

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## BATTLE OF ARRAS 1917.



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The British Prime Minister himself was first in the field : he showered congratulations and good wishes, and required of Haig a Memorandum on the present situation for their guidance as to future plans. "The Prime Minister," said Haig, "has forgotten the warnings we gave him. Now he is all smiles and says that he shudders to think what might have resulted if we had failed like the French. A few weeks ago he denied us everything, now he appears to have but one thought—to give us every assistance he can."

There was too much of the steadfast Scot in Haig to respond to the rapid mental transitions of the Welsh Prime Minister. Haig's confidence in anyone once destroyed was seldom if ever re-established. Outwardly he showed no sign. Rigidly and frigidly courteous to the Head of the Government, his distrust of him remained unshaken. The congratulations gave him little pleasure and no confidence.

In the Memorandum required of him he pointed out that the principles which had guided those responsible for the Arras attack were the same as those which had proved successful in all warfare since time immemorial :

1. To wear down the enemy's power of resistance to such an extent that he would not be able to stand the decisive blow.
2. To deliver the blow when he is thus weakened.

The enemy, in Haig's view, had been appreciably weakened, but time was required to wear down his great strength. The situation was not yet ripe for the decisive blow. Nivelle had failed because he had miscalculated this factor, and a return must now be made to the method of the Somme—the duration of which could not be calculated—of further wearing down the German resistance.

He recommended that the British effort should now be concentrated on an endeavour to clear the Channel Ports. Success there appeared to him to be reasonably possible, and would give valuable results on land and sea ; even if full measure of success was not gained, yet Haig contended (using the same arguments which as we now know Falkenhayn used

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in connection with his attack on Verdun), it would mean attacking the enemy on a front where he could not escape, but must accept the challenge to battle.

The French Government followed the British Government in an appeal for advice. Already they had substituted Pétain for Joffre as their immediate military adviser, with authority over Nivelle, but Nivelle was still in name the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army.

It is characteristic of Haig's magnanimity and singleness of purpose that, despite all that had passed between Nivelle and himself, he was averse to his removal at this juncture. Nivelle, although his conception of the battle had been at fault, had proved himself a ready and determined tactical commander. A change of command at this stage must necessarily disturb the progress of the fighting, and Haig considered that the Aisne attack, although it had failed to attain decision, could and should be pressed on to carry forward the "wearing down" process essential before final victory could be obtained. The French Army must now in its future operations return to the principle of attack, which had been accepted by Joffre and himself as the result of previous years' experience. Even Haig's support, however, could not save Nivelle, and bring about the continuance of the French effort.

Wilson from French General Headquarters reported constant changes in the plans of the French Government. One day it was arranged that Pétain should be Commander-in-Chief, and Foch Chief of Staff; the next day it was decided Nivelle should remain as Commander-in-Chief and Pétain his Chief of Staff. There was inevitable dislocation, with the peculiar result that letters written to the French Commander-in-Chief remained for days unanswered.

Haig still trusted that the French effort would be continued, but the hope was now slight.

The losses of the French Army on the Aisne were reported in the French Press at 240,000. French public opinion, inflated by extravagant hopes, was correspondingly depressed. Haig's comment on the reported losses was to the effect that the figure should be halved, and actually this rough-and-ready method of calculation proved approximately correct,



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but the harm had been done. The French Government was in no position to ignore popular clamour, and orders were issued for the attack to be stayed. Immediately the troops were relieved of the strain general disaffection and even mutiny in certain units broke out, and for the remainder of the year the French Army as an offensive force had to be definitely left out of account.

Nivelle was replaced by Pétain as Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, and Foch succeeded Pétain as adviser to the French Government.

Pétain set resolutely and energetically to work to restore the moral of the French Army, and personally addressed the officers of over a hundred French divisions. Extensive leave facilities were granted to the French soldiers (ten days in every four months), resulting in the permanent weakening of the effective strength of the French Army by some 340,000 men. Pétain himself paid a hurried visit to Haig, and besought him to attack the Germans to give time for the French Army to recover, and throughout the summer he constantly renewed this plea for help.

To this appeal Haig was able to give a cordial and whole-hearted response. The hope of transferring the British effort to his northern flank had always been present in his mind. Now, as he himself wrote: "I was at length able to turn my full attention to divert the bulk of my resources to the development of the Northern attack." (Despatches.)

It was in fact only a reversion to the second portion of the plan, mutually agreed on by Joffre and Haig in November, 1916 (cf. page 230); but the conditions were far less favourable than had been anticipated when under the Joffre-Haig plan the British were to transfer the bulk of their forces to the Flanders Front, where the offensive was to be continued to the utmost extent possible.

Under that plan the great British effort was to have been preceded by a general co-ordinated "wearing-out" battle on the Somme model—from Vimy to the Oise. The German armies would have been subjected to the "renewal of the Somme battle," which Ludendorff has since confessed was his greatest fear.

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Weakened both in moral and numbers by such a trial, the German armies would have had to meet the blow of the British in Flanders. The Battle of Arras, great as had been its success, had been an isolated blow.

"The situation" (after the Battle of Arras), writes Ludendorff, "was extremely critical, and might have had far-reaching and serious consequences if the enemy had pushed further forward. No doubt exceedingly important strategic objects lay behind the British attack, but I have never been able to discover what they were." Under the Nivelle plan the only strategic object of the Arras attack was to draw away reserves from the Aisne; to the success of that limited purpose Ludendorff's own testimony is decisive: "The Battle of Arras was at its height in the second half of April, and was swallowing up a liberal supply of reserves and material, when on April 16th the French opened their formidable offensive on the Aisne and in Champagne."

Though the Battle of Arras had thus achieved its specific object, the failure of the French on the Aisne sterilized its effect on the future operations. Nor had the Aisne offensive inflicted serious casualties on the Germans, and it had left them with the heightened moral that must inevitably follow victory.

Though Haig was fully conscious of the less favourable circumstances under which he was now to begin his effort in Flanders, there were other reasons which gave him high hopes. The superiority of the British troops displayed at Arras was greater than he had anticipated. He could for a time at least expect a cessation of civilian interference. His armies were growing. At their heads were tried and experienced leaders, united in sincere confidence and trust in their Chief. Valuable time had been lost, but the year had not yet run half its course. Attacks by the Russians and Italians were impending. Above all, the evidence that came back from the front line showed a decrease in the fighting power of the German Army that even the effects of the Aisne could not wholly counteract.

It was therefore with high hopes that on May 5th he issued orders to General Plumer to make preparations for the

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attack on the Messines Ridge, which, he directed, should take place on June 7th, and was to be a prelude to the main effort to follow as soon as preparations could be completed against the enemy in Flanders. This in its turn, he hoped, might still result in the freeing of the Channel Ports before the end of the year.

Throughout the whole period of his command, Haig laid great weight on the selection of the most suitable Army Commander for each particular operation. He had entrusted the Somme battle to Rawlinson and Gough; Vimy to Allenby and Horne; Messines was now to be the task allotted to Plumer, and the initiation of the battles in Flanders was committed to Gough.

Rawlinson—for the moment not involved in the forthcoming battle—was given the supervision of a minor amphibious operation, which was designed to capture (in conjunction with the naval forces under Admiral Bacon) the port of Ostend, behind the German line on the coast of Belgium.

The general outline of the whole plan of operations was expounded by Haig at a meeting of his Army Commanders. The main effort in Flanders was to be delivered north of Ypres and pressed forward until it threatened the German railway communications from their own country to the coast; the small operation on the coast was to assist the main Flanders offensive. If complete success was not attained in Flanders, the wearing-out process would be effective and might well result in such weakening of their strength elsewhere that by a rapid blow at some other suitable portion of their line late in the year the ramparts of the beleaguered German Empire might be stormed.

From May, 1917, until the end of the year the British Army alone stood between the Germans and victory. The price of the Calais Conference was being paid in British blood at Passchendaele.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN, 1917

H AIG had not allowed the altered circumstances caused by the Calais Conference wholly to disturb the preparations for the northern offensive, which had been an integral part of the Joffre-Haig plan. Great progress had been made with the work. Railways were perfected; munition dumps had been formed; and vast quantities of road material collected for throwing forward roads after a successful assault.

In the Messines area deep mines, begun as early as July, 1915, had been prepared under the enemy's position. No less than four and a half miles of mine galleries had been driven. During May all these preparations were pressed forward to completion.

The immediate requirement was for an attack as early as possible to draw German pressure away from the French Army. An attack on the Messines position would not only effect this, but would also materially improve the British position for the main effort north of Ypres, which was the essential and main feature of Haig's proposed operations for the remainder of the summer. Although now in sole control of the only offensive which the Allies could undertake, he sought the assent of the French Commander-in-Chief to his proposals. Pétain believed that all prospect of breaking through on the Western Front should be abandoned for this year, and that the British as well as the French Armies should confine their fighting to small operations with limited objectives. Nevertheless he gave both his approval and loyal

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support to Haig's plan. He agreed to take over a small portion of the British line and to co-operate with two minor attacks at Verdun and the Chemin-des-Dames, and ultimately he was able to divert a small French force under General Anthoine to operate with the British in Flanders itself. With these exceptions the fighting on the Western Front for the remainder of 1917 resolved itself into a duel between the British and the Germans, in which every German division on the Western Front was successively engaged and defeated by the British at one or other period in the battles which followed at the Messines Ridge, at Passchendaele and at Cambrai.

At dawn on the 7th June, the simultaneous explosion of nineteen mines under the German trenches on the Messines Ridge was the signal for the assault by the infantry, under cover of a hurricane of artillery barrage, on a front of nine miles.

No attack in the whole war proceeded in more precise accord with a prearranged time-table. By 4 p.m. all the objectives had been gained, and some 7,200 prisoners and sixty-nine guns had been taken. Counter-attacks were driven off and the operation stood as a complete and perfect example of military enterprise.

It was no part of Haig's plan to press the offensive beyond the line attained on June 7th. The object of the preliminary attack had been accomplished; the dangerous right flank of the Ypres salient had been secured; German reserves had been drained; most important of all, the effect on the moral of both British victors and defeated Germans was very marked.

"The 7th June," says Ludendorff, "cost us dear . . . the drain on our reserves was very heavy; it was many days before the front was again secure;" and by the end of the month Hindenburg was writing to the Emperor: "Our greatest anxiety is the decline in the national spirit."

A brief visit to London had enabled Haig to explain his plans to the War Cabinet.

On June 19th Haig attended a Cabinet meeting at Lord Curzon's office. He had discussed the situation both in the Cabinet and individually with Milner, Curzon, Bonar Law

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and Smuts, as well as with the Prime Minister. He related that each one of them appeared more pessimistic than the other. The Prime Minister, in particular, had insisted that we should husband our forces until the following year and do nothing except support our infantry with guns. Haig had urged on them the advisability of active operations for what he called "pressing home" the advantage gained, and asked that all available forces should be concentrated on the Western Front, on the plea that if the fighting continued at its present intensity Germany was within six months of exhaustion of her available man-power.

His representations appeared to reassure the Cabinet. At the time his prestige was high. The War Minister wished to recommend him for a Peerage, but Haig, though greatly gratified, declined. His son had not yet been born; and he had no wish for further recognition of his work until his whole task had been accomplished.

Even the Prime Minister appeared to Haig to be well satisfied with the plan which he had submitted to him for the Flanders operations. Robertson would not commit himself so deeply, but he agreed that Haig's plan was the only possible thing to do. The Prime Minister was now gravely concerned with the Naval Problem, and mentioned to Haig a proposal to send Robertson to the Admiralty as First Lord. At a breakfast at Downing Street, the Prime Minister had consulted Haig and Geddes on the Naval Problem, and Haig read to the Prime Minister some paragraphs from a Memorandum which he had submitted to the Slade Committee in 1914 on the reorganization of Staff methods in the Navy, which appeared to impress the Prime Minister so much that he asked for the complete document in order that it might be more carefully considered at the Admiralty.

These signs of restored confidence had heartened Haig, and on this visit to London he had the deeper satisfaction of a reconciliation with Sir John French, whom he visited at the Horse Guards. The interview was characterized by great frankness. French admitted that the order to relinquish his Command had been a great blow to him and that he had thought and said many things which he later regretted.

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He realized now that it was best for the country that he had surrendered the reins to Haig.

On his return to France Haig pushed forward his final preparations for the main offensive from the Ypres salient. The front to be attacked was extended northwards from the northern flank of the ground gained in the Messines battle for a distance of fifteen miles.

The main blow was to be delivered by the V army under Gough, on a front of seven and a half miles, while the II Army, by a small advance, protected its right and a French army its left flank.

The date of the attack was to be July 25th—the earliest date by which preparations could be completed. Haig was already anxious about the weather conditions that were to be anticipated. Careful investigation of the records of more than eighty years showed that in Flanders the weather broke early each August with the regularity of the Indian monsoon : once the autumn rains set in difficulties would be greatly enhanced.

Haig's plan included an attack along the coast and an amphibious raid behind the enemy's line to capture Ostend. This attack could not take place with any hope of good strategic results until the principal offensive had secured the main ridge.

If the weather broke, progress would naturally be slow, and at the same time conditions of tide and sea limited the opportunity for the amphibious attack to the circumscribed period of the high tides of the month of August or, at latest, September.

If the attack took place on the 25th there was some justification for anticipating at least a week of good weather, which would carry the greater portion of the British line out of the low-lying ground on to the ridge, where the rain would not materially impede further operations. Each day's delay in opening the attack would inevitably give further opportunity for German troops to reach the threatened area and for the organization of the defence.

All these arguments were pressed on Haig by his staff, and particularly by the Intelligence Service ; but, on the other hand the Commanders from the front line urged delay. A few more

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days were required to move forward more artillery with complete aerial observation of the enemy's battery positions.

Between these conflicting views Haig had to make a decision. At a conference of Army Commanders a few days before the 25th the matter was threshed out in discussion. Haig was, for once, a prey to doubt. He reminded the conference of Napoleon's remark to his Marshals under somewhat similar circumstances, "Ask me for anything but time." On the other hand, he had a very fixed principle in dealing with Army Commanders, that once an attack was committed to them he would meet their views as to its execution in every possible way. In the end he decided to postpone the attack until 28th July. As he came away from the conference, Haig, for almost the only time in the war, expressed doubt of the wisdom of his own decision. He knew how narrow was the margin and how grave the risk, and on the 26th and 27th his forebodings increased.

The clear weather gave place to dense mist. The aeroplanes could not complete their work of reconnaissance and artillery registration for either the British Army or the French army which was to co-operate on its left. Further postponement until the 31st was ordered, and on the afternoon of the 31st the weather finally broke.

Rain fell heavily and continuously for four days, and intermittently for many succeeding days. In spite of these adverse weather conditions, the assault begun on July 31st, while it fell far short of complete success, achieved important results. (*See Sketch.*)

Within a few days the whole of the enemy's front line and a large part of the second line was in our hands, and the British had gained a foothold on the crest of the ridge immediately south of the Ypres-Roulers railway, and had captured some six thousand prisoners and a few guns.

Unfortunately, there now set in the wettest August recorded for thirty years. The inhabitants had, it is true, made provision even for such exceptionally torrential rain in peace time by the construction of an elaborate drainage system, but now the intricate network of surface and subsoil drains, patiently designed and executed by the industrious



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Belgian agriculturists, were destroyed by the artillery fire, and the steady downpour of rain transformed the plain into a sea of mud.

As Foch once said: "La boue is bad, and le Boche is bad—but the two together . . ."

There could be no hope of exploiting the success gained until the rain ceased, and it was not until the middle of August that a slight improvement in the weather allowed the attack to be resumed. Meantime the Germans had strengthened their position, and, though on the 15th and again on the 16th of August, progress was made at a few points, at others counter-attacks drove us back to our original line.

The lack of success brought about an alteration in Haig's plans. The weight of the attack was moved south and entrusted to Sir Herbert Plumer, with the object of extending the British hold on the high ground immediately east of Ypres. On September 20th, in spite of heavy rain on the preceding night and a dense mist in the morning of the attack, a deep indentation was made in the German line. (*See Sketch.*)

Again Haig changed the axis of the blow to the northward, and by the end of September a definite stage had been accomplished; the ridge for a distance of nine thousand yards lay in British hands, forming an admirable defensive position against any further German attacks. German reinforcements had been poured into the threatened area. There was no longer any prospect that in the brief time that remained before winter put a definite end to extensive attacks the Germans could be driven out of Flanders.

Great loss had been inflicted on the Germans. Even more important was the steady deterioration in their fighting qualities. "It was still," wrote Haig, "the difficulty of movement far more than hostile resistance which continued to limit our progress, and made it doubtful whether the capture of the remainder of the ridge was possible before winter finally set in."

Haig had to decide between the alternatives of discontinuing the battle in Flanders, and seeking an issue in another portion of the front, or of continuing the Flanders effort with a waning hope of decision and with the certainty of heavy

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casualties to his own Army. In his own Despatch he gives a brief and not altogether convincing explanation of his reasons for persisting after his September attack. "There was no reason to anticipate an abnormally wet October," he writes. "The enemy had suffered severely . . . the German High Command had recognized the failure of their methods, and were endeavouring to revert to something approximating to their old practice of holding their forward positions in strength. After weighing these considerations, as well as the general situation and various other factors—among them the desirability of assisting our Allies in the operations to be carried out on the 23rd October in the neighbourhood of Malmaison—I decided to continue the offensive further and to renew the advance at the earliest moment consistent with adequate preparation. Accordingly I determined to deliver the next combined French and British attack on the 9th October," which carried the British line up to the Forest of Houthulst.

Mr. Winston Churchill criticizes the decision. "Even in October," he writes, "the British Staff were planning and launching offensives, and were confident of reaching the goal of decisive results." Confidence of reaching the goal was not the determining consideration. It was not hope but necessity that decided. At this very moment Pétain was appealing to the British to continue their attacks and give the French time to reorganize after their defeat on the Aisne.

When Mr. Winston Churchill's criticism was brought to Haig's notice in 1926 he replied that he had no objection to any criticisms, provided the facts were correctly stated. He added that no one except himself could know of the constant appeals that had been made to him by the French leaders to continue his attack and prevent dangerous developments on the French front, whenever any change in the British plan or cessation of the British pressure on the Germans was suggested.\* These appeals were, he said, made to him in confidence, and he had maintained strict secrecy

\* It is interesting to contrast this commentary of Haig's with Mr. Winston Churchill's statement on p. 332 of his book: "The French Army was no doubt saving its strength as much as possible; but the casualty tables show that in 1917 they inflicted nearly as many losses upon the Germans as did our own troops."

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about them even in his dealings with his own immediate staff, as long as the war had lasted.\*

The period of restored confidence and trust by the Cabinet had proved of short duration. By the end of August it had declined, and by September it had totally disappeared. Mr. Churchill—most convinced and eloquent of Easterners—had joined the Government on July 16th in charge of the Munitions Department, and on 22nd was writing the Prime Minister “cordially agreeing” with the Italian project and deploring the renewed offensive in the West,† and urging a fantastic scheme to transport six divisions from the Salonika front and put them “behind Jemal’s Army.” This, he argued, would “force that Army to surrender, and all the Allied troops in Syria and Palestine, including Allenby’s, would be free by the Spring of next year for action in Italy and France.”‡

By September all the old friction between the Home Government and General Headquarters had broken out afresh. On September 25th the French and British Cabinets, at a conference at which Haig was not present, had decided on an extension of the British line in France, with a consequent reduction in the intensity of the effort in Flanders. Haig at once protested, but without avail. Clemenceau and Foch pressed for the extension as far south as Berry-au-Bac; Pétain was more moderate, but even he required the relief of six divisions as far as the Oise. The reasons advanced were the reduction of the effective strength, owing to the new leave rules (see p. 266), and the lowered moral of the French army.

While the British War Cabinet was devoting its attention to exploring the possibilities in theatres of war other than France and Belgium, Ludendorff under the hard pressure of events was also seeking an issue in other theatres, but from a

\* Letter from Haig to the Author.

† “The World Crisis,” p. 334.

‡ Field-Marshal Sir W. Robertson, in “Soldiers and Statesmen” (p. 175), points out that after making necessary allowance for preparations on land and sea, quite apart from any question of fighting, the leading divisions would have had to begin re-embarking for home before the rear divisions would even have arrived, if they were to be in time for operations in Flanders in the spring.

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very different estimate of the situation. He could not yet hope to collect sufficient strength to embark on a great offensive against the British, and from the Italian theatre alarming reports of the condition of his Austrian allies were reaching him. Action in Italy became imperative, and the impending, and now inevitable collapse of Russian resistance enabled him to divert from the Eastern Front the six to eight German divisions which he considered sufficient to overcome Italian opposition.

By a successful campaign in Italy, with even a few German divisions, he sought both to sustain the Austro-Hungarian Army and to relieve the Western Front.\*

He had planned the attack for September, but the vigorous British offensive in Flanders had forced its postponement until nearly the end of October.

On October 24th the Austrian Army, reinforced by six German Divisions, attacked the Italians and drove them back in utter defeat. There was general consternation both in Paris and London, and it had immediate results on the battlefield of Flanders. There were two ways of meeting the Austro-German success—by the despatch of British and French troops to strengthen the direct resistance of the Italians, and by continuing and intensifying the pressure on the German troops in France, to prevent more German reinforcements being sent to stiffen the Austrians. Both plans were adopted.

The British Government forthwith ordered five British divisions to leave Flanders for Italy.

Haig, with his clearer perception of the actual military situation, would have retained the whole force in the West, and relieved the Italians by striking hard at the heart of the German strength. He even sent a Staff Officer to London to represent this view to the Government, but his advice was rejected.

The Prime Minister was in no mood to listen to strategic counsel. He had unwillingly assented to the operations in Flanders, and now he felt that his first instincts had been correct. Nor did he consider it necessary to conceal his

\* Ludendorff: "My War Memories," Vol. II., p. 482.

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disapproval of the military plans from the world at large. On November 12th at Paris in an after-luncheon speech, and in the presence of French Ministers, he delivered a speech bitterly resented by Haig and the whole Army. In it he disparaged the military leadership of the Allied Armies.

"When we advance a kilometre into the enemy's lines and snatch a small shattered village out of his cruel grip; capture a few hundreds of his soldiers, we shout with unfeigned joy—and rightly so, for it is the symbol of our superiority over a boastful foe, and a sure guarantee that in the end we shall and can win."

Words of this nature spoken by the head of the Government could not fail to exert an adverse influence on the moral of the Army. The disparagement of results attained was cold comfort to troops who, at the very moment the words were uttered, were about to enter into battle. And they added an immense weight to the load of anxiety borne by those whose hard task it was to order others into danger from which they themselves were debarred. No doubt the Prime Minister did not intend or even realize when he delivered his speech that it could have but one of two results, both unfortunate, to the army. It would result either in the deepest resentment if his words were rejected or in the most serious decline in fighting power if they were accepted as true.

Those hostile to Haig and Robertson were prompt to follow the Prime Minister's example, and criticized their leadership in adverse terms.

Sir Edward Carson,\* a member of the War Cabinet, endeavoured in a public speech to counteract the effect of the Prime Minister's speech. "I have," he said, "met in the course of my work as a member of H.M. Government three great men—I say that advisedly—Field-Marshal Haig, Sir William Robertson and Sir J. Jellicoe. They have my absolute confidence, and it is really difficult to understand the different trends of thought which have appeared (if you analyse them) in the last fortnight in relation to these men, who, morning, noon and night, go through anxieties which words cannot picture, who are burdened with orders

\* Now Lord Carson, P.C.

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and commands which involve hundreds of thousands of lives, and who see themselves held up from time to time to the odium of their countrymen, as though in some way or other they were betraying their country, if not by their corruption, at least by their incompetence.”

When called to account by a question in the House of Commons, Mr. Lloyd George explained that the speech had been delivered with a view to arousing public interest, and to call attention to the necessity for a reorganized system of command. This statement did nothing to placate the troops in France, and on a visit to the Front a few weeks later the Prime Minister met with anything but a favourable reception from the men in the ranks.

Meanwhile, with a depleted force, Haig had renewed his attacks and captured Passchendaele, but the final attack in Flanders had no other object than to pin the German force to their ground. Haig realized that any advance which might now be possible in this area would not bring him within striking distance of his strategical objective, and he had already decided to finish the active campaigning of the year by a blow against some other portion of the German lines, where he might obtain surprise, and might even with the limited force now available achieve important strategic results.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

ALTHOUGH the plan to follow the operations in Flanders by an attack of this nature had been in Haig's mind throughout the whole of August and September, it was not until the middle of October that the definite decision to strike at Cambrai was made.

There were several weighty reasons for the choice. At the beginning of 1917 the Germans had sought to disturb the Allied plans by withdrawal to the carefully prepared Hindenburg Line. Now an extension of this entrenched zone was under preparation in the Cambrai area, covering points of great tactical advantage. A surprise attack in the last few weeks of the year would forestall any reorganization the Germans might have in mind. The line was not yet very strongly held, but by the new year large German reinforcements would have reached the Western Front from Russia. Moreover, while even a partially successful attack would secure important tactical ground, complete success might be converted into an important strategical advantage.

As in all Haig's big attacks, there was to be one novel feature which would take the enemy by surprise. At Cambrai this was particularly essential, for only a small force was available. The novel feature in the Cambrai attack was the absence of any preliminary artillery preparation. Tanks were to destroy the enemy's line, and the position was to be carried by assault. In many ways the plan resembled that of the Battle of Messines, with tanks substituted for mines.

The defeat of the Italians on the Piave, and the consequent withdrawal of British troops from France to Italy, while it reduced the forces available, and thereby minimized



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the chance of complete success, added at the same time a strong argument in favour of the continuance of offensive operations in France until the end of the year. It was only by this means that the Allied armies in the main theatre could ease the pressure on the Italians. The French Army, though recovering, was still unfit to undertake any important offensive. The task must inevitably, therefore, devolve upon Haig and the British troops.

Haig's own Intelligence Service calculated that no large hostile reinforcements were likely to reach the scene of battle within forty-eight hours; after that they could arrive at the rate of two divisions a day up to a total of thirteen divisions.

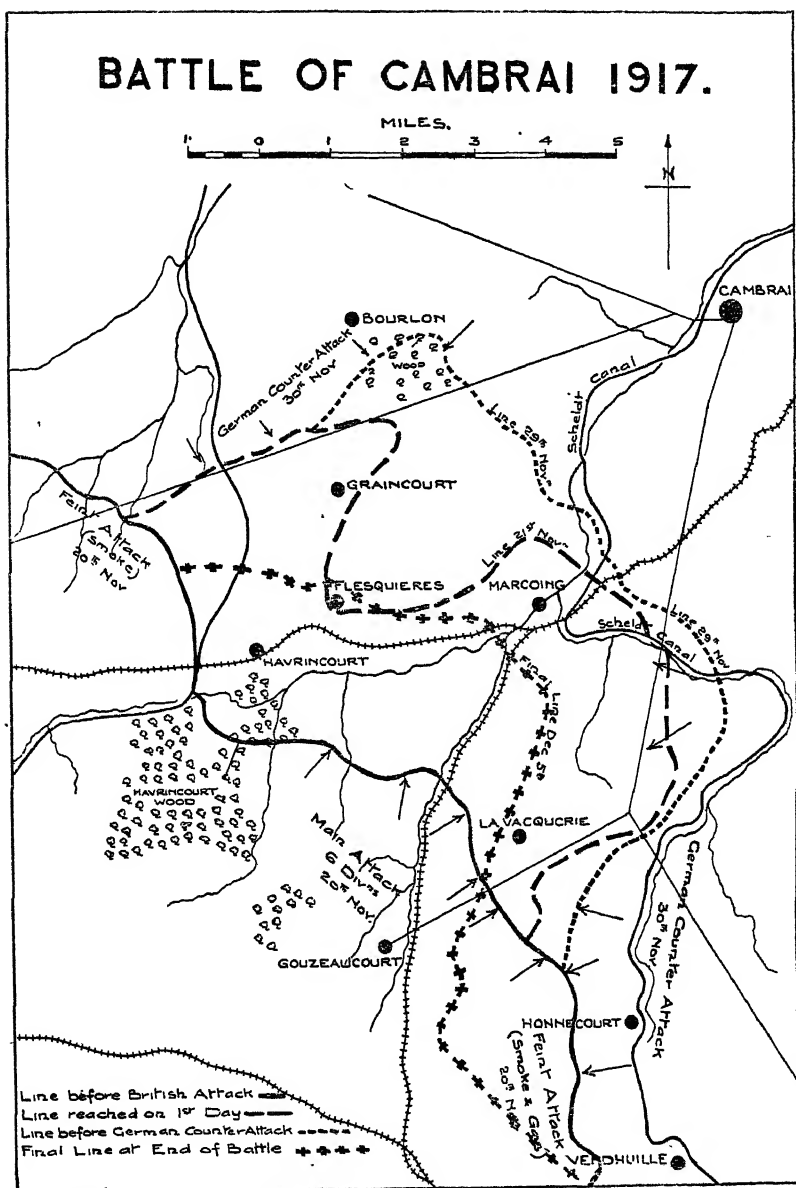
Yet within a few days much might have been accomplished by the attack, and it was hoped that a sufficiently favourable position might be attained to meet and defeat any counter-attack which the Germans could launch. On the other hand, Haig was well aware that every available division was being used in the attack. There would be no fresh troops to oppose to a counter-attack.

The margin of safety was small—less, indeed, than in any other attack which Haig had undertaken or was later to undertake; but it was no gambler's throw. Every possibility was carefully weighed. The advice which Haig received from his Staff was not unanimous. His Intelligence Service definitely advised that the attack was too hazardous to be undertaken; it calculated on a larger number of German divisions reaching the battlefield within ten days than actually arrived. But the strategical considerations could not be disregarded, and with a full knowledge of the risk which he incurred, Haig determined to strike.

The results of the fighting on 20th and 21st November exceeded expectation. Three separate lines of formidable German entrenchment were pierced on a broad front to a depth of four and a half miles, but the ill-important points of Bourslon Wood and Bourslon Village still remained in German hands.

At this stage the situation had reached a definite crisis. All the troops available at the beginning of the battle had been engaged. Though the casualties had been unusually

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low, the two days of hard fighting had been exhausting. Before any further demands could be made on the men a few days' delay was essential.

The forty-eight hours of grace before the arrival of the advance-guard of the German reinforcements were over, and from now onwards the German strength would steadily increase, and there could be no corresponding addition to the British force.

These considerations pointed direct to the advisability of breaking off the battle ; but on the other hand the position which the troops now held was untenable, so long as Bourlon Ridge remained in German hands, and a partial withdrawal would be necessary. The tactical position on which Haig set great store would still remain in German hands. Information received both from the front line and from the air was contradictory. Certain reports gave definite information of German preparations for retirement, and of the decreasing resistance offered to British attacks. Others emphasized a precisely contrary view. There was even uncertainty as to the actual line reached by our attack in many important localities.

Haig had to give weight to the Italian situation, which was still serious, and which might well be eased by continuous pressure on the Cambrai front.

At the very time when Haig was pondering over these considerations, two of the divisions which were under orders for Italy were unexpectedly placed at his disposal, and although he could no longer hope for any further deep advance into the German position, he decided to renew the attack, and on the 23rd, 25th and 27th fresh efforts were made.

The attacks were unsuccessful. Some progress was made, but the commanding position necessary to consolidate the advanced line of the British troops still remained in German hands. By the 27th there came definite indications of a strong German counter-attack : movements were observed on the roads and railway and new divisions were identified. On the following day the Intelligence Service were able to give a definite forecast of the direction and the strength of the German effort, covering both the left and right flank of the

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salient formed by the British advance, and on the 30th November this counter-attack took place. The main attack on the left was withstood, but on the right the Germans met with unexpected success.

Although the attack had been foreseen, and preparations had been made to meet it, yet aided by a morning mist, and advancing with great determination and rapidity, the Germans succeeded in surprising the British divisions, and retook a large portion of the ground which had been captured by the first British attacks. At one time the situation looked very serious, but the Guards division, moving rapidly forward from the reserve and pressing straight into the fight, restored the position and the battle became stationary, and after a few days desultory fighting died away. By the end of the year it was possible to take stock of the results of the whole of the Cambrai operations from 20th November onwards.

Some 12,000 yards of German front-line trench, together with about 10,000 or 11,000 yards of the Hindenburg Line, 150 guns and 11,000 prisoners remained in British hands; but against this the enemy had made a small advance on the extreme right of the battle area.

Haig's decision to continue the attack after the 21st has been adversely criticized, and will in all probability continue to be the subject of controversy amongst students of military history. From a purely local point of view much was risked, with little prospect of success, and with small hope of actual territorial gain. On the other hand, the divisions which the Germans had to employ in their counter-attack at Cambrai would have been available for the Italian front had Haig withdrawn his line on the 21st. The best justification of Haig's action is to be found in Ludendorff's remark: "The English Army Commander did not exploit his great initial success, or we should not have been able to limit the extent of the gap. If he had done so, what would have been the judgment on the Italian campaign?"

It was the absence of the British divisions which had been sent to Italy that prevented Haig's pressing his success at Cambrai after November 20th, and achieving fuller success. The contrast between civilian and military views on the

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situation is interesting. There are only two methods of meeting a hostile blow in war : one is by direct interposition of a force at the threatened spot, the other is by an energetic offensive elsewhere. The civilian view demanded the immediate despatch of divisions to Italy. Haig, on the other hand, would have preferred to intensify his blow in France.

Apart, however, from its effect on the Italian campaign, the Battle of Cambrai regarded as a whole was indecisive. It cannot be claimed as a victory, nor admitted as a defeat. Its results had fallen far short even of the moderate hopes that had been entertained at General Headquarters, but it had attained some compensating local success ; and Haig, though disappointed, was not dissatisfied. But in Great Britain it had far-reaching and almost disastrous results.

A number of fortuitous circumstances had raised British hopes very high. Haig had during all the operations of 1917 issued direct instructions that the Press correspondents were not to dwell on British achievements unduly. The language was to be guarded. The heroism of the troops could and should be extolled, but no reference was permitted to strategic plans or strategic results. More especially no allusion was allowed to the state of the French Army or to the necessity of relieving the pressure exerted upon them. Throughout, the Press correspondents had responded loyally and ably to Haig's wishes.

In particular in the case of the Cambrai offensive, with its limited purpose, and the small number of troops available owing to the reinforcements that had been sent to Italy, special instructions had been issued prior to the first day's operations that any success gained must not be over-emphasized.

This direction had been faithfully carried out, and the correspondents' articles on the first day's fighting, while describing the dramatic action of the tanks, made no extravagant claims.

By an accident in the postal arrangements these accounts were delayed in transmission, and consequently only the short official communiqués of the first day's fighting appeared in the London Press on the 21st November. These stated baldly

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that a series of operations between St. Quentin and the River Scarpe had been undertaken with satisfactory results.

Meantime an important body of opinion at home apparently headed by Lord Northcliffe had arrived at the conclusion that the British public was unduly depressed by the accounts of the fighting in Flanders, and that it required bracing up by less restrained Press articles from the correspondents at the front. Lord Northcliffe urged this view on the authorities, and Haig ultimately concurred. The correspondents were given a free hand to write up the second day's fighting, and the Press of the 22nd November contained the account of both days' fighting, occupying many columns in every newspaper, and ending on a note of high hope for the achievement of further success.

In *The Times* phrases such as "splendid victory," "bewildering success" and "glorious Battle of Cambrai" appeared, beneath an enormous headline, "THE VICTORY." Other newspapers showed a similar tone of excitement. Although the official despatches were studiously moderate in their statements, merely saying that: "Our troops have broken into the enemy's position to a depth of between three and four miles on a wide front . . ." and that "important progress has been made," the public took their tone from the Press.

Wild enthusiasm and optimism spread like a wave over the whole populace. The church bells were set ringing, and hope reached its high-water mark.

When a few days later the news of the German counter-attack was published, there was a corresponding reaction. Unduly inflated hope yielded to a depression equally unjustified. The public felt that they had been cheated. Lord Northcliffe himself led this new outbreak.\*

\* It is possible that this sudden withdrawal of Lord Northcliffe's support may have been due to motives even more personal in their nature than an instinct to conceal his error in recommending the "ringing of the bells of victory." On his return from his mission to the U.S.A. Northcliffe had passed through General Headquarters and dined with Haig. With characteristic self-absorption, Northcliffe expected to find in Haig an appreciative listener to his account of his work and achievements in America, but Haig was preoccupied with the reports from the front, and showed little sign of interest in Northcliffe's conversation. To those who were witnesses of the episode it

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At the same time his papers began to attack both the Army and the Government.

The effect on the relations between General Headquarters and the Government was instantaneous, and Haig, under strong pressure from home and with deep reluctance, deemed it advisable to reorganize his Staff, who had been with him almost without change throughout his command.

The health of the Chief of the General Staff had suffered severely under the prolonged strain, and on medical grounds his resignation of his office was inevitable, although Haig himself would have wished to give him a period of leave of absence in the hope that his health might be restored. In addition to this change, Haig replaced his Quartermaster-General (who was transferred to an appointment at home), and the Head of his Intelligence Service (who was given another post at General Headquarters). Although the changes were effected smoothly and without any dislocation, Haig realized that the pressure which had been exerted on him was an indication of reduced confidence in himself, and his belief in his destiny was temporarily shaken but rapidly reasserted itself.

But he never forgot what he regarded as either a lack of honesty or of mental balance on the part of Lord Northcliffe. Until that date some degree of mutual trust and even cordiality had existed between these two men—each supreme in his own sphere of activity. Henceforward Haig was unwilling even to meet Lord Northcliffe, and later in 1918, when there was a suggestion that Northcliffe might receive high office in the Government, Haig's comment was that this "would be disastrous."

To succeed these officers of his Staff, Haig selected old and tried comrades in arms. General Sir Herbert Lawrence (who had served with Haig in the South African War, and who brought with him a record of distinguished military service as Staff Officer and Divisional Commander during the

was obvious that Northcliffe's vanity was wounded; and as he left Haig's château Northcliffe remarked that he thought Haig's grasp of affairs was weakening, and that he doubted whether he could continue to support him. Yet only a short time before he had said: "Tell the Chief that if 'George' ventures to do anything against him, I will put him out of office."

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Great War, and a reputation for able civilian administration), took over first the charge of the Intelligence Service, and subsequently succeeded General Kiggell as Chief of Staff. General Lawrence was succeeded as Head of the Intelligence by Brigadier-General E. W. Cox, who, on his death, was in turn succeeded by Brigadier-General S. Clive. General Travers Clarke, who had served on Haig's Staff at Aldershot, and with the I Corps, became Quartermaster-General in succession to Sir Ronald Maxwell.



## CHAPTER XXI

### RAPALLO CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE WAR BOARD OF THE SUPREME WAR COUNCIL

THE sharp repercussions due to the breakdown of the arrangements made at the Calais Conference had liberated Haig from Cabinet interference in the execution of his plans during the Summer and Autumn of 1917. Mr. Lloyd George, however, had not abandoned his intention of resuming active ministerial control of the strategy, nor indeed had he relinquished his idea of subordinating the British Army to the direct control of the French leaders.

The hard pressure of events had extracted from the Prime Minister an unwilling assent to the resumption of the general scheme designed by Joffre and Haig for the battles of 1917, and had resulted in the apparent restoration of his confidence in Haig and Robertson, but if there was indeed any renewal of confidence it was at best only temporary and half-hearted.

Mr. Lloyd George had reinforced his own position in the Government by recalling to the Cabinet on 16th July Mr. Winston Churchill, who was a strong advocate of the Eastern theory of strategy and shared the Prime Minister's disinclination to listen to expert military and naval advice if contrary to his own strategical views. As early as 22nd July, 1917, we find him writing to the Prime Minister: "I deplore with you the necessity of giving way to the military wish for a renewed offensive in the West."\*

Having strengthened his position at home, Mr. Lloyd George had little difficulty in finding a willing colleague across the Channel in the person of M. Painlevé, the Minister of War.

M. Painlevé had previously approached Mr. Lloyd George

\* "World Crisis."

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with a proposal for an inter-Allied General Staff under Foch, as a preliminary to the appointment of a Generalissimo, but the British Prime Minister had then replied that public opinion in Britain would not support the plan.

When on September 17th M. Painlevé became Prime Minister in France he revived the proposal, and, according to his own account, at a meeting at which only he and Lloyd George were present—*seul à seul*—it was agreed that full effect should be given to the proposal “as soon as possible;” and that in the meantime Foch should be given command of the Allied Reserve until British public opinion would admit of his being made Commander-in-Chief.\*

It would appear, however, that the detailed plan which M. Painlevé expounded went further than Mr. Lloyd George considered advisable at the time, and although the matter had gone the length of a Cabinet discussion in London (October 18th), no decision had been reached.

Haig was too well informed to be unaware of the tendency of both French political opinion and of Mr. Lloyd George's attitude, but no official information of the proposal was communicated to him, nor does the Prime Minister appear to have consulted his responsible adviser at the War Office—Robertson.

Instead he had appealed to unofficial and more flexible military opinion, and had called for the views of Lord French and General Wilson, both at this time employed in England. Wilson in his reply had advocated an inter-Allied War Council, charged with the duty of “studying and insuring co-ordination and co-operation in the Allied Force.”

In the midst of these deliberations there broke the disaster of the Italians on the Piave. The military measures which were adopted to restore the situation have already been described. In the Council Chamber action was equally prompt. “The Prime Minister,” wrote Mr. Churchill, “reacted with his accustomed resilience. He set off to Rapallo, where he had proposed a meeting with the French and Italian political and military Chiefs” (“World Crisis”). There can be little doubt but that he had already in mind the intention of

\* “Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain,” Painlevé.

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resuming direct ministerial control of the military operations on the lines already discussed between Painlevé and himself.

The Conference assembled on November 9th, 1917, and after a brief discussion reached accord, and drew up the following formal agreement :

(i) With a view to the better co-ordination of military action on the Western Front a Supreme War Council is created, composed of the Prime Minister and a Member of the Government of each of the Great Powers whose Armies are fighting on that front. The extension of the scope of the Council to other fronts is reserved for discussion with other Great Powers.

(ii) The Supreme War Council has for its mission to watch over the general conduct of the war. It prepares recommendations for the decision of the Governments and keeps itself informed of their execution and reports thereon to the respective Governments.

(iii) The General Staffs and Military Commands of the Armies of each Power charged with the conduct of military operations remain responsible to their respective Governments.

(iv) The general war plans drawn up by the competent military authorities are submitted to the Supreme War Council, which, under the high authority of the Governments, ensures their concordance, and submits, if need be, any necessary changes.

(v) Each Power delegates to the Supreme War Council one Permanent Military Representative, whose exclusive function it is to act as technical adviser to the Council.

(vi) The Military Representatives receive from the Governments and the competent military authorities of their country all the proposals, information and documents relating to the conduct of the war.

(vii) The Military Representatives watch day by day the situation of the forces and of the means of all kinds of which the Allied Armies and the enemy Armies dispose.

(viii) The Supreme War Council meets normally at Versailles, where the Permanent Military Representatives and their Staffs are established. They may meet at other places as may be agreed upon, according to circumstances.

The meetings of the Supreme War Council will take place at least once a month.

The Permanent Military Representatives will be as follows :

For France.....	General Foch
For Great Britain .....	General Wilson
For Italy .....	General Cadorna

Robertson, the responsible adviser of the British Cabinet,

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was not consulted before the conference, and, according to his own statement, he did not feel called upon to lodge formal objections when the terms were communicated to him. Neither Robertson nor Haig took violent exception to the new body: indeed Haig expressed the opinion that, in the form and with the functions outlined in the agreement, if it would do little good, at least it could do little harm. The Executive War Board, which was to be the source of trouble in the future, had not been thought of, and the Supreme War Council appeared to be only an alternative, and possibly more convenient, method of consultation and joint action by the Governments of the Allied states. While it was to be provided with all information, it was concerned only with "general war plans," and had no control over the actual operations.

It did constitute a direct encroachment on the prerogative of the chief military adviser of the Government in London, but it would make little real difference to the position of the actual commander in the field. Provided the two Commanders-in-Chief were in agreement, the "securing of concordance" by the Supreme War Council would be a work of supererogation. In the event of disagreement, the new machinery for composing differences might prove less cumbersome when operated by the Prime Ministers and their military advisers than the old method of separate reference to London and Paris. Haig himself was to remain responsible to his own Government. With the personalities of the military adviser selected by the Prime Minister he was not directly concerned.

There was, however, one marked difference between the positions of the British and French military representatives in the Council. While the French Prime Minister proposed to take with him to the Supreme War Council General Foch, who was at the time his constitutional military adviser, the British Prime Minister was selecting a soldier with little war experience, and one who was amenable to political pressure. From Mr. Lloyd George's own point of view he had now provided himself with two alternative councillors—Robertson at the War Office and Wilson on the Supreme War Council—who were well known not to see eye to eye on many of the existing military problems.

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But from the point of view of the army in the field no immediate evil results need have been anticipated even from this fact. The Supreme War Council was only to meet "at least once a month," and the military representatives were not given power to issue direct orders to the Commander in the Field. Haig thought that it might in fact prove easier for him to deal with the military representatives in joint and permanent session, than with the War Office, about the few questions on which he and the French Commander-in-Chief would not be able to reach agreement.

During the whole of December, 1917, Haig had been anxiously reviewing the possible German plans for 1918. His Intelligence Service had brought to his notice unmistakable indications of the preparation for a German attack. Early in January they became more pronounced, but Haig was not yet absolutely convinced. He believed the correct German strategy was to avoid a massed attack, which would not in his opinion succeed, and which would, if unsuccessful, result in utter disaster. "If you set the problem to any Staff College student," he said, "you would get the same answer: 'An all-out attack by the Germans must end in ultimate disaster to them.' " He was unwilling to ascribe to the Germans a plan which he felt convinced was strategically unsound, but there was no denying the evidence, so rapidly accumulating, that, whether "all-out" or not, a formidable German attack was in course of preparation.

During January, at a meeting in London, Haig was asked the definite question :

If you were Ludendorff would you consider that a "smashing" offensive would have sufficient chance of success to justify the losses which would be incurred ?

Haig had replied that in war, victory was attained alternatively by the destruction of the moral of the hostile army in one great continuous battle, or by lowering the moral of the enemy nation to breaking-point by constant limited attacks.

Haig personally believed that the enemy would be more likely to adopt the second of these alternatives. A great attack would involve them in enormous losses, both in men and material, which they were no longer in a position to meet,

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and the failure of any such attack would forthwith imperil the whole German situation. The strength of the Allied Armies was increasing, while that of their opponents was on the wane. Nevertheless, he was making preparation, he said, for both eventualities. Some form of attack by the Germans was now inevitable. Provided the strength of the British Army in the field was maintained, Haig had no doubts of his ability to hold his front, whatever form that attack might take, but he urged that Great Britain must be prepared to meet casualties to the extent of one hundred thousand each month for several months to come. There might well be surprise attacks against both the British and the French, and if these attacks were successful during their early stages, they would probably be followed by attacks on a much greater scale.

In spite of the representations of Haig, strongly reinforced by Robertson at the War Office, the Government appeared to be unable to realize the gravity of the situation. No steps were being taken to provide the necessary man-power to keep the British Army in the field even up to defensive strength, or to provide reserves from which the inevitable gap in the ranks during the forthcoming German attack could be filled.

To his anxieties in connection with the forthcoming campaign was added the knowledge that the confidence of the Cabinet in Robertson and himself had been still further weakened by the results of the Battle of Cambrai. He was prepared to accept his own supersession, but he considered that Robertson's retention was essential to the successful issue of the war. By the end of November Haig was impressed by the conviction that the Prime Minister was deeply dissatisfied with him, and faced the possibility of his own removal. He again represented that it would be better that he should be relieved at once, rather than remain to be the target of nagging criticism. If the Prime Minister still desired him to remain in command, then he urged that he must be fully trusted. His own resignation seemed to him of less importance than that of Sir William Robertson, whose presence at the head of the General Staff he considered vital to the cause.

He had hoped that the innocuous provisions of the Rapallo Conference would end the political manœuvres and enable

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him to devote his undivided attention to his work in France. He had not appreciated the full import of the Rapallo decision, and was unwilling even to listen to warnings that came to him of further intrigue in London. All that bickering, he declared in December, 1917, should be forgotten: it cannot help us to win; let us do our best in the present, and prepare for the future.

As the year drew to its close the effects of the conference and the real intentions of the Governments were borne in upon him, and his distrust of the Prime Minister was revived and intensified. The supreme direction of the war was being transferred from London—where hitherto Haig had been able to rely on the support of Robertson and the General Staff at the War Office, and where some measure of check had been exercised by the War Cabinet upon the Prime Minister—to Paris, where the advice of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff would be less effective and the War Cabinet would be practically impotent.

He received information that the Prime Minister had determined to supplant Robertson by Wilson, and that an effort already made had only been frustrated by the threat of resignation from certain members of the British Cabinet. He was aware that Wilson had been summoned to London, and it was impossible to avoid the suspicion that he and the Prime Minister were in league against Robertson, and that there was a grave risk of Wilson's supplanting Robertson in London. Haig considered that Wilson's substitution for Robertson at the War Office would mean the removal of the only restraint on the Prime Minister's actions.

His distrust in Wilson's strategic judgment was as deep-seated in his mind as his disbelief in the military capacity of the Prime Minister. With Wilson at the War Office, he feared (and his fears were justified by events) a reversion to eccentric strategic schemes, and the diversion of the reinforcements so urgently needed in France. Even the Supreme War Council might develop into a dangerous factor, for there was little hope that either Wilson or the Prime Minister would prove an effective champion of the claims of the British Army against those of their French Allies.

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Outwardly impassive, calm and confident as ever, Haig watched the close of the old year a prey to secret forebodings. Throughout these anxious weeks he still drew renewed strength and faith from his deep conviction of divine assistance. On a dull December Sabbath within the little Scottish church on the ramparts of Montreuil, he listened to a sermon preached by his faithful chaplain, Duncan, on the text of Christ's prayer in Gethsemane: "If thou wilt, O God, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, thy will, not mine, be done." . . . And its answer: "And an angel came and ministered to him." To one who was with him, Haig communicated his thought: "When things are difficult there is no reason to be down-hearted. We must do our best, and *for a certainty* a ministering angel will help."

He had spent the first few days of the New Year on leave, and had received from His Majesty his Field-Marshal's baton\* on the afternoon of the 2nd January.

He was summoned to an interview with the Prime Minister to discuss the outlook for the Spring Campaigns in France. Somewhat to his surprise he found the Prime Minister unusually affable. Mr. Lloyd George went out of his way to remind him that in 1915 the defences of the I Army—then under Haig—had alone in the British Army in France been found adequate for all emergencies, and Haig, ever sensitive to praise, had been greatly pleased. There had even been a cheery and pleasant luncheon party with the Prime Minister, at which bets had been laid by some of the guests on the duration of the war. It is noteworthy that even at this early date Haig advanced the opinion that Germany could not continue fighting after the Autumn of 1918, on account of the internal state of the country, but nevertheless the next few months would be critical. The Prime Minister tried to induce Haig to admit that the German Army was done, and that there would now be no German Spring offensive, but Haig, as he said afterwards with grim satisfaction, avoided the trap so craftily baited for him.

Immediately on his return to France he found himself

\* He had been created Field-Marshal in January, 1917, but only now received the insignia of his rank.



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involved in the perennial problem of the relative fronts. During November he had come to agreement in principle with Pétain that the British front should by the conclusion of the year's operations be extended as far south as Barisis. Haig, while he did not wish to infringe the terms of agreement, had found it impossible to complete the extension as early as Pétain desired; and Clemenceau (who had succeeded Painlevé as Prime Minister during November) and Foch intervened with the demand that the extension of the British line should extend as far as Berry-au-Bac. Clemenceau even threatened to resign if the demands were not met, but ultimately agreed to refer the matter to the Supreme War Council.

The War Council, after the fashion of all Councils, resolved on a compromise. The British line was to be extended to the River Ailette. Haig at once protested, and in a letter of January 13th asked that he might be relieved of his command rather than be forced to agree to an extension which would, in his opinion, endanger the security of his Armies.\*

The Supreme War Council was now faced with a dilemma: it had no power of enforcing its decision, nor could it accept Haig's resignation, even had it so desired. The machinery had in fact broken down at its inception, and the Council had to direct its attention forthwith to evolving some more workable method. A full session of the Council was convened at the end of January to take stock of the situation. It had a full agenda. It had to solve the problem of a revised machinery to amplify the recommendations which the Rapallo Conference had outlined, and it had to decide on the effective strengths at which the Allied armies in the field should be maintained.

The first problem resolved itself into the question of the command of the Allied force in France. There were three possible solutions. There was the Painlevé suggestion of a Generalissimo. There was the proposal to retain—at least until such time as the American Army in France reached a size to justify its having a voice in the highest decisions—

\* Ten days previously Ludendorff had proffered his resignation for somewhat similar reasons. Ludendorff, p. 559.

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the existing system of co-operation between the two Commanders-in-Chief and collaboration with the two Chiefs of the Imperial General Staffs of France and Britain; and there was the compromise of putting a portion of the duties of the Generalissimo in commission by the appointment of an Executive War Board, attached to the Supreme War Council, and charged with the formation and control of a General Reserve drawn from the Armies in France.

The proposal for a Generalissimo was dismissed by general consent at once. Mr. Lloyd George had already in the House of Commons (Hansard, 19th November, 1917), in defending the proposals of the Rapallo Conference, given forcible expression to the objections.

"Having agreed that it is desirable to get some sort of central authority in order to co-ordinate—I use the word my Right Hon. friend used: there is no better—what is the best method of doing it? He examined three alternatives. I am in complete agreement with him in his views with regard to the first two. The first has been put forward in very responsible quarters, and that is the appointment of a Generalissimo—a Generalissimo of the whole of the forces of the Allies. I agree with him. Personally I am utterly opposed to that suggestion for reasons which it would not be desirable to enter into. It would not work. It would produce real friction and might really produce not merely friction between the Armies, but friction between the nations and the Governments. The second suggestion is a suggestion which finds favour, not merely in France, but in America. America, France, Britain and Italy have agreed to join in this Allied Council, but so far as I am able to gauge American opinion by the criticisms which have appeared in responsible newspapers, America would have preferred a Council with executive powers, with greater powers. That is a criticism in France—the criticism is not that we have gone too far, but that we have not gone far enough."

Between the two alternatives remaining after the rejection of the proposal of a Generalissimo, the decision was a foregone conclusion. Both British and French Prime Ministers—though for different reasons—had determined that the existing system should terminate.

Compromise appeals irresistibly to Councils, and although the debate and discussion were prolonged, the adoption of the proposal for the creation of an Executive War Board was inevitable.

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The functions of the Board were defined in a formal agreement.

1. The Supreme War Council decides on the creation of a General Reserve for the whole of the Armies on the Western, Italian and Balkan fronts.

2. The Supreme War Council delegates to an executive composed of the Permanent Military Representatives of Great Britain, Italy and the United States of America, with General Foch for France, the following powers to be exercised in consultation with the Commanders-in-Chief of the Armies concerned :

(a) To determine the strength in all arms and composition of the General Reserve and the contribution of each national Army thereto.

(b) To select the localities in which the General Reserve is normally to be stationed.

(c) To make arrangements for the transportation and concentration of the General Reserve in the different areas.

(d) To decide and issue orders as to the time and place and period of employment of the General Reserve ; the orders of the Executive Committee for the movement of the General Reserve shall be transmitted in the manner and by the persons who shall be designated by the Supreme War Council for that purpose in each particular case.

(e) To determine the time, place and strength of the counter-offensive, and then to hand over to one or more of the Commanders-in-Chief the necessary troops for the operations. The moment this movement of the General Reserve, or any part of it, shall have begun, it will come under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief to whose assistance it is consigned.

(f) Until the movement of the General Reserve begins, it will for all purposes of discipline, instruction and administration, be under the orders of the respective Commander-in-Chief, but no movement can be ordered except by the Executive Committee.

3. In case of irreconcilable differences of opinion on a point of importance connected with the General Reserve, any Military Representative has the right to appeal to the Supreme War Council.

4. In order to facilitate its decisions, the Executive Committee has the right to visit any theatre of war.

5. The Supreme War Council will nominate the President of the Executive Committee from among the members of the Committee.

Just as at the Council of War in August, 1914, Haig had sought to bring discussion back to realities by a series of

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pertinent questions, so now, when the decision was intimated, he asked by what channel he was to receive orders from the new executive body. But the Council was in no mood to face practical problems. The question was brushed aside, and was never answered during the brief period of the Executive War Board's existence. Consequently it was never in a position to issue a single executive order, and when the irresistible march of events put an end to its inglorious career it proved to have been as sterile of practical results as a village debating society.

With the problem of command settled to its satisfaction, the Supreme War Council next turned its attention to the second question—the strengths of the Allied armies in France. Every effort of Haig and Robertson to bring home to the Prime Minister the gravity of the position, and the serious effects that any diminution in the number of effectives would have in the fighting theatre, had failed. Late in January, 1918, Haig had pointed out that one of the chief difficulties of the situation was to bring home to the Prime Minister the seriousness of the position, and to cause him to call more men to the colours while there was yet time. Not only would the Prime Minister not call up more men, but he was bent on diverting a large proportion of the small numbers available to eastern theatres.

At the Council meeting, Haig repeated his opinion that both French and British armies in France would sustain half a million casualties during the next few months, and that the British would be reduced by the equivalent of thirty divisions and the French by thirty-five.

Even these grave warnings did not suffice to divert the British Prime Minister from his determination to pursue his Eastern adventure, and all Robertson's protests were swept aside. At last M. Clemenceau intervened to say that, while he could not prevent Great Britain's doing what she thought best, he strongly urged that the British would not divert any men Eastwards for at least a couple of months. Then and only then did the British Prime Minister give way and agree to the postponement of his plans.

It was well that he granted even this small concession,

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for had the troops now held ready in Britain for the Palestine project been definitely committed to the East they could not have been brought back in time to fill the gaping rift in the Allied line after the great German attack in March, and no human power—not even the heroism of the troops and the indomitable will and consummate leadership of their Commander—would have prevented the German attack in March achieving complete success. Much of the loss to the British Army in those first few days of the German attack in March and the highly critical position that arose on March 24th can be directly and fairly attributed to the decision of the British Prime Minister to retain in Britain troops destined for Palestine while so desperately needed in France.

No sooner was the meeting of the Supreme War Council over, and its members dispersed, than events followed with dramatic rapidity in London. The various steps are recounted in some detail by Sir William Robertson in his book. With these manœuvres Haig was in no way concerned, nor was he even aware of them. He had returned to General Headquarters and was deeply engaged in perfecting the arrangements of the Army in anticipation of the German attack, when on 9th February he was called to London and informed of the decision of the Cabinet to replace Robertson by Wilson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The reason given to Haig was that Robertson\* had declined to act either

\* The Government proposals as at first communicated to Robertson in a note signed by Mr. Lloyd George (which Mr. Churchill characterizes as "virtual dismissal"), were as follows :

1. The Military Representative at Versailles to be a member of the Army Council, and to be absolutely free and unfettered in the advice he may tender to the Board of Military Representatives at Versailles.
2. Full powers to be given to the Military Representative to issue orders in respect of divisions included in the General Reserve.
3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London to continue to be the supreme military adviser of the Government.

Sir Henry Wilson was nominated as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Robertson as Military Representative.

A proposal of this nature meant not only the introduction of a fifth wheel into the military coach, but the transference of the reins from the hands of the soldiers to those of the French Government.

For while the French member of the Board at Versailles still remained the military subordinate of General Foch, who in turn was subordinate to the French Government, the British military representative was to be entirely free of control and would be only one of three military members of a board.

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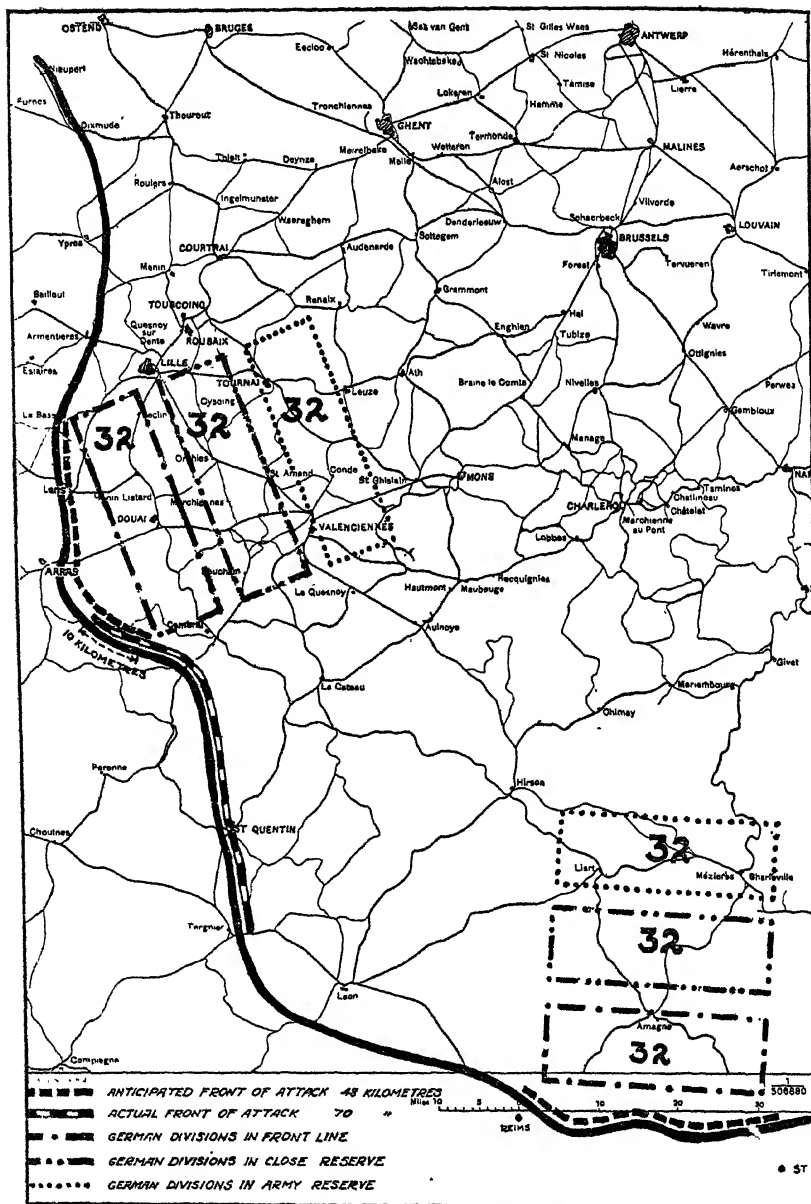
as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, with Wilson as military representative at the Supreme War Council, or to serve on the Supreme Council himself with Wilson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Haig foresaw the fulfilment of his worst fears, and he made strenuous efforts to secure the retention of Robertson's services. He pointed out that under the arrangements now completed by the Supreme War Council the military representative at Versailles had full power to commit the Government and to make decisions which had hitherto been the sole prerogative of the British Cabinet. Haig urged that the best solution of the present difficulty was Robertson's proposal that he himself should act on the Council along with Foch. Further, Haig warned the Prime Minister of the distrust in which Wilson was held by the Army in France. His own personal disbelief in Wilson was not prejudice; still less did any personal animosity influence him. Even during the short time that Wilson had been on the Executive War Board Haig's distrust in his judgment had found unexpected confirmation.

As the result of a War Game Wilson and his Staff adventured a forecast of the enemy's probable plans. The Germans according to the forecast would attack with one hundred divisions about the 1st July on the front between the La Bassée Canal and the Bapaume-Condé Road. The information at Haig's disposal led him from the outset to disagree entirely with the forecast, and events were to prove him right in every particular. The date was miscalculated by three months, the strength by fifty per cent., and the front on which attack was anticipated was the only portion of the British front which was not in fact attacked as a whole.

In spite of Haig's representations the Prime Minister was not to be deflected from his intention to replace Robertson by Wilson, and on the 15th February Haig, once again in France, received the news of Robertson's resignation, and of Wilson's appointment as Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

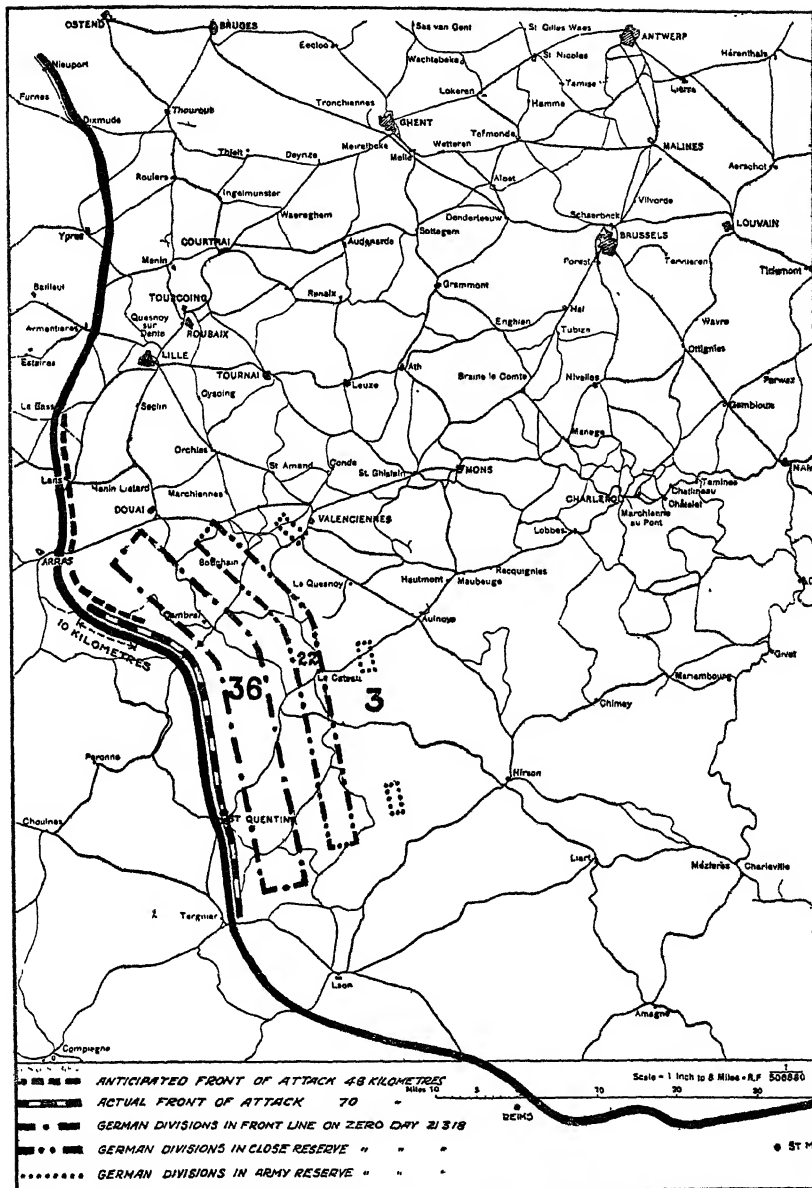
At the same time it came to his notice through the Press and from other sources that it was being announced in London that he himself was "in full agreement" with the new

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G.S.G.S. Map No. 3064 Ordnance Survey. By permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office,  
**GERMAN CONCENTRATION AS FORMULATED BY THE  
 SUPREME WAR COUNCIL**

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G.S.G.S. Map No. 3054 Ordnance Survey. By permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

ACTUAL GERMAN CONCENTRATION. March 1918



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organization which was proposed by the Government and which had led to Robertson's resignation. Though to Haig's mind the system was ludicrously crude and unsound, he was prepared to do his best to make it work, but he would not allow his name to be quoted as one of the sanctioning authorities. He informed the Secretary of State that, while he was willing to help the Government in every way, and would do nothing to embarrass them, he wished the actual facts and his own opinion to be placed on record in the archives.

Perhaps the best commentary on these political activities, and the best analysis of the underlying motives which actuated Mr. Lloyd George at the time of Robertson's dismissal, is a passage from Mr. Churchill's book. "The Prime Minister," he writes, "was moving cautiously but tirelessly towards the conception of unified command. . . . A proposal which obviously involved placing the British armies under a French Commander was one which he judged as yet beyond his strength to carry. It was a hazardous issue on which to challenge the joint resignations both of Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig. . . . Nevertheless, Mr. Lloyd George continued by a series of extremely laborious and mystifying manœuvres to move steadily forward towards his solution."

If the British Prime Minister actually feared the joint resignation of Robertson and Haig, and anticipated even the possibility of their making common cause in a sort of Trades Union Strike against the civilian authority, he completely misread the characters of both men. However much Haig might disapprove of the Prime Minister's choice of military adviser, it was the constitutional prerogative of the Prime Minister to select whoever he wished, and Haig would have considered any active interference on his part a violation of his duty to the head of the State. His efforts were accordingly restricted to tendering advice, and this was ignored.

Nor did Haig consider it incumbent on him to decline to work under the new system of the Executive War Board, unsound though he perceived it to be. In his view the civil authority was acting within the bounds of constitutional right

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in deciding the system whereby they would exercise control over the armed forces of the Crown. His own view was clear. His study of history had convinced him that Councils of War, whatever their nature, had invariably failed to exercise effective control on active operations. A Council of War would spend its time in argument and discussion, when a decision was the immediate requirement. If it ever did arrive at a decision, it would do so too late. There could, in Haig's opinion, be no satisfactory compromise between one Generalissimo controlling the operations of all the Allied Armies through the respective Commanders-in-Chief, and the existing system of loyal co-operation between independent Commanders-in-Chief of these armies. An Aulic Council must lead to indecision and confusion, and thereby endanger the cause.

But his advice had been disregarded, and he was now prepared to do his utmost to make the new system serve its purpose.

Prior to Wilson's departure to assume his new appointment the Executive War Board had resolved on the formation of a General Reserve of thirteen divisions, to which the British were to contribute eight. The Board had no authority to issue a direct order for the withdrawal and movement of the troops, but it communicated the results of its deliberations to the Commander-in-Chief. Although the official letter was not issued from Versailles until February 28th, the requirement was known early in February. Haig had taken prompt exception to it. He had pointed out the importance of the British front; the necessity of guarding the Channel Ports and the railway communications. Already all his Army Commanders were appealing to him for more troops to hold the fronts which he had allotted them; even as far as Barisis the British front would be no less than one hundred and thirty miles, and in the centre the Portuguese troops attached to the British Army were a constant source of weakness. In all there were fifty-seven British divisions, and of these forty-seven were considerably below establishment. The divisions were about to be reduced by three infantry battalions—yet even after this reduction there would

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be no reinforcements to meet heavy casualties. He was about to receive back from Italy two divisions, and these he was prepared to place at the disposal of the War Board, but he would make no further concession.

Haig went further than a criticism of the actual proposal. He pointed out that the whole question of the status of the War Council was involved. The Government now had at their disposal alternative proposals—from the Versailles Council, based upon a war game, and Haig's own recommendations framed on his long experience in command of forces in the field. They were vitally different both in their view of the probable German intentions and the action necessary to meet them. It seemed impossible to imagine that they would prefer a war game to practical experience. Pétain shared Haig's disbelief in the Executive War Board's forecast of German intentions, and he considered that mutual assistance could be more readily obtained by direct arrangement between the Commanders-in-Chief than by the intervention of a Council.

Accordingly the two Commanders-in-Chief made arrangements to meet the eventuality of a hostile attack against either or both of their armies. Detailed plans were prepared for the rapid concentration in event of emergency of French reserves in the British area, and of British troops in the French area should the main German attack develop against one of the Allied Armies.

Special attention was paid to the actual situation which matured in March—namely, a heavy hostile attack at the point of junction of the two armies. For this contingency arrangements were made for the rapid movement of eight French divisions by road, rail and bus—as an immediate reinforcement, to be followed by a similar number at a later date. The arrival of Rawlinson\* to take Wilson's place on the Executive War Board confirmed this arrangement. Rawlinson, with his full knowledge of the conditions at the front, was in complete agreement with Haig as to the

\* Haig had been directed by the Prime Minister on February 17th to select an officer for the post. Haig decided to nominate Sir Henry Rawlinson, then commanding the IV Army, and within a week he had assumed charge of his new appointment.

## *RAPALLO CONFERENCE*

impossibility of detaching more British divisions for the General Reserve. The proposal for a General Reserve under the War Board was quietly dropped.

For the few weeks that elapsed between the formation of the Executive War Board and the outbreak of the great German attack, the Board had no task to perform, and when the issue was joined in the field of battle it was replaced by the appointment of a Generalissimo, which finally and effectively freed the leaders in the field from the hampering shackles of civilian interference in strategy.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE GERMAN ATTACK—MARCH, 1918

WHILE the events described in the preceding chapter had been taking their course in the Council Chamber, the British Army in the field was preparing for battle. In the first days of the war the miniature Expeditionary Force had withdrawn in rapid retreat before overwhelming hostile strength, then had followed a few weeks of attack, a month of fierce defence in Ypres, and thereafter three years in which Haig's leadership had been directed to attacking his enemy. Now, as in 1914, the British Army was again faced by the problem of withstanding in defence an attack by greatly superior numbers.

There was no question about this superiority. The collapse of Russia had set free great numbers of German and Austrian troops. From November onwards there had been a steady and increasing stream of trains across Europe to France and Belgium, bringing great reinforcements to the German armies. In November, 1917, the number of German divisions on the Western Front was 146; by March, 1918, it had increased to 192. The composition of the new units and the number of the drafts were faithfully and promptly reported by the Intelligence Service. For the time numerical superiority lay with Germany. In due course, but only after many months, the arrival of the armies of the United States could be depended on to redress the balance.

While the strength of the German army was increasing that of the British Army under Haig was decreasing, as its responsibilities were being extended. All Haig's efforts

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to obtain full concentration of British effort on the Western Front had proved fruitless. Preparations were still being made at home for active and extensive operations in Palestine, and reinforcements were not reaching France. Divisions were reduced by order from London from thirteen battalions to ten. Almost simultaneously Haig had to take over another twenty-eight miles of line from the French on his right flank, bringing his total front up to 125 miles, and the French troops, who had co-operated with the British in Flanders in 1917, had been withdrawn.

As early as December, 1917, Haig had issued orders to his Army Commanders to take in hand immediate defensive preparations. Vast defensive works were undertaken, and every available man was employed to press the work towards completion. Instructions for the tactical handling of the troops were prepared and issued throughout the Armies. Arrangements for co-operation with the French were made. Active patrol work and numerous raids on the whole extent of the German trench line revealed the disposition of the enemy troops.

As the weeks passed Haig was left in no doubt as to the area to be attacked. Information accumulated, and by the middle of February it appeared certain to him that the main effort was to be made south of Arras.

Haig's defensive scheme was now complete. The Northern armies—important though they were for the security of the Channel Ports and the coalfields—were left with the minimum of troops consistent with safety, and more than half Haig's force was allocated for the defence of the threatened section.

The command of the Armies in the area to be attacked was entrusted to General Gough, with four Army Corps (fourteen divisions and three cavalry divisions), holding a front of forty-two miles (of which ten were partially protected by the marshes of the Oise River and Canal); and to General Byng, also commanding four Army Corps (of fifteen divisions), holding a front of twenty-seven miles.

The general principle of the defensive arrangement was in three defensive zones or belts sited at considerable distances

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from each other, the forward belt being in the form of a lightly held outpost line.

In addition preparations had been begun, but were not fully completed, for a strong bridge-head to cover Péronne and the crossings of the Somme south of that town.

Only in one particular did Haig's forecast of the probable nature of the German attack prove incorrect. He had anticipated that the marshes near Mory would prevent the enemy attacking in that area. The rapid drying of the marshes in an exceptionally dry spring had, however, allowed the Germans to cross without difficulty.

During the whole of January and February Haig had been occupied in visiting his Army and supervising preparations. To enable him to visit the various portions of his long front without undue fatigue or waste of time, he had been provided from home with a special train—formerly one of the Royal trains—and he had had this fitted up as a travelling Headquarters to furnish both sleeping and office accommodation for himself and his immediate staff. In it he spent much of his time during these months of anxious preparation.

The details of one day are typical of many spent during this period. Towards the end of January his train arrived at Merville about 4 a.m. Breakfast was at eight. Immediately after breakfast he visited I Army Headquarters at Hinges, then went on to La Buissier and Ranchicourt, where he mounted his horse and inspected a brigade, and examined the horses and wagons of the train, looking with all the keenness of the cavalry officer at the harness and trappings of the horses. Subsequently he motored to Lorette Spur and inspected a division, and proceeded from there to visit the Canadian Corps and part of the Vimy Ridge. Lunch was eaten at the roadside near Noeux-les-Mines, and after lunch he made a detailed and systematic examination of the Headquarters of a division, passing on to inspect another Corps and a Divisional Headquarters; at the latter he interviewed all the Staff and many of the Company Commanders. Finally, on his way back, he inspected at Béthune two battalions which had sustained heavy casualties at Cambrai, and at 6 p.m. returned to his train at Merville.



*Photo : Imperial War Museum*

EARL HAIG AT WORK IN HIS RAILWAY CARRIAGE





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By March 3rd the Intelligence Service were able to supply Haig with more precise information. The date of the German attack was fixed as the "second half of March," and the front was correctly defined with the exception of the marsh area. Three days later the date was ascertained as falling between the 20th and 24th, and by March 10th, 185 German divisions had been located on the Western Front.

During this anxious month of March, Haig's mind was eased of one great burden. While her husband himself was at home on a brief visit Lady Haig gave birth to a son. Haig's mind had been torn between his eagerness for an heir and his concern for Lady Haig's health, and when his doctor allayed his fears, bringing the good news that the son and heir he had so much desired was born, the barrier behind which Haig concealed his emotions for once broke down. Impulsively he embraced the doctor, kissing him on each cheek. "Like a damned foreigner!" as the doctor added, in recounting the incident.

Relieved of that great personal anxiety, Haig returned to France to face the ordeal which lay ahead of him. On March 21st, at 4 a.m., the Chief of the General Staff went to Haig's bedroom and informed him that the great attack had opened.

Haig, in his own despatches, has given a detailed description of the course of the operations during the March attack, and has depicted them in forceful and vivid language. Ultimately the British official history may amplify this account. It will suffice here to summarize the course of the operations.

By midday on the first day the enemy had driven back our thinly-held outpost zone, and in one area (Ronssoy) had pierced the second zone. During the afternoon and evening fierce fighting ensued in the battle zones, but nightfall found them still firmly held. The immediate break-through for which Ludendorff had hoped had not been accomplished, and it had become evident to Haig that the Germans had committed the whole of their available force to this one effort, and he was enabled to take in hand plans to bring reinforcements from other armies—now secure from attack for some weeks. During the night General Gough withdrew

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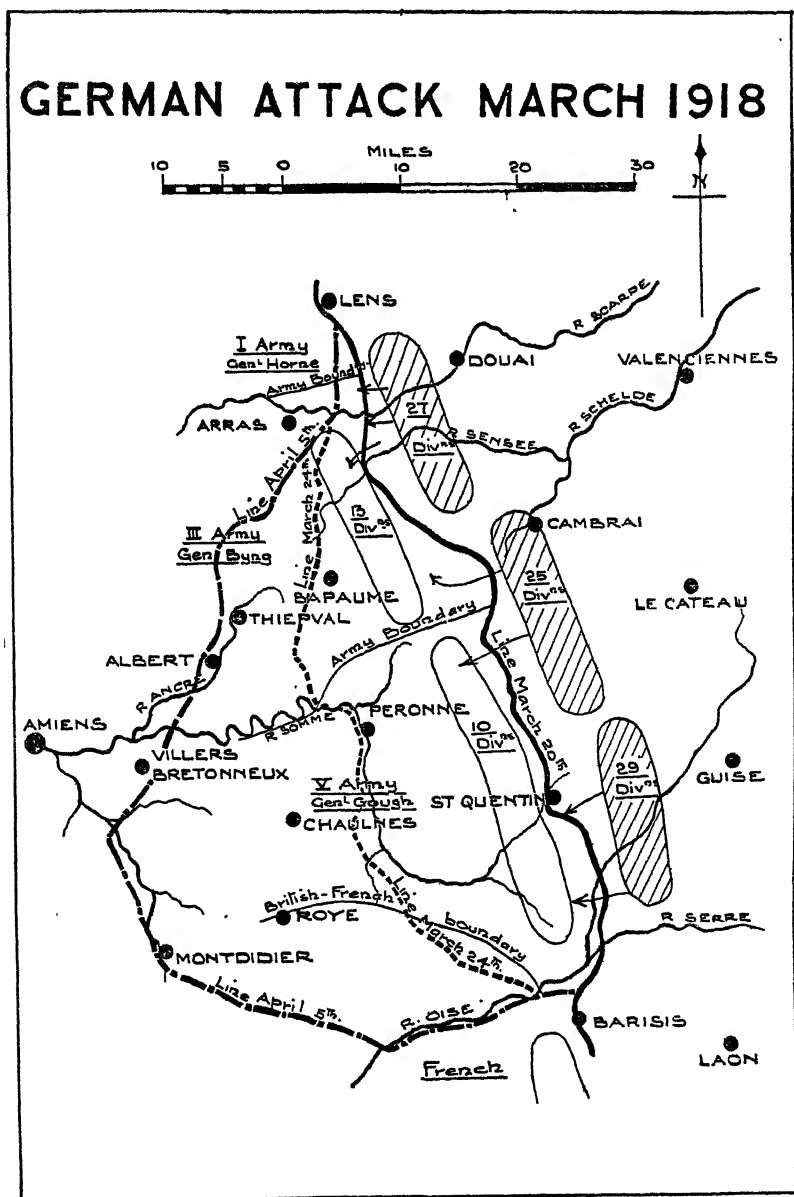
his right flank behind the Crozat Canal, and General Byng withdrew from the Flesquières salient.

On the second day the German attack was renewed ; by 1 p.m. the enemy had forced the crossing of the Crozat Canal, and by the afternoon had broken through the battle zone at St. Quentin. All the local reserves of the V Army had now been thrown into the fight, and shortly before midnight the Army Commander withdrew to the general line of the Somme on the right flank to hold the bridge-head.

Early in the morning of the 23rd General Gough had made the fateful decision to abandon the Péronne bridge-head, and by nightfall the general position was along, but behind, the Somme River as far as Péronne, with the important exception that at Ham the enemy had forced the crossing of the river. So far the position—though grave—was not critical.

During the course of the day Haig had had a personal interview with Pétain to co-ordinate the operations of the French divisions which, according to the agreement between the two Commanders, should shortly reach him (see p. 308). Pétain informed him of the immediate despatch of eight divisions, to be followed by another six divisions, which should reach Montdidier about the 30th March. While these movements were not as rapid as Haig would have desired, yet so far he had no reason to anticipate that they would be inadequate, and that they would not conform in the operations to the general plan. Pétain had told him that the reinforcements would be under the command of General Fayolle, and Haig directed his staff to get in touch with General Fayolle on the following day to arrange the details of joint action. On the evening of the 23rd, and even until midday of the 24th, therefore, the situation, though grave, was not critical. The course of the fighting during these first two days had not disclosed to Haig's balanced judgment of the great struggle any dangerous weakness in the Allied plans. The prearranged co-operation of the French would safeguard the dangerous point of junction of the two Allied Armies. His own counter-attack, which he proposed to deliver southward on the flank of the salient formed by the advance of

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the German line, would in due course develop. The whole German attack, whatever local success it might attain, must fail provided it fell short of driving a wedge between the French and British Armies. To General Edmonds, who saw him on the evening of the 22nd March, he permitted himself one of his rare statements of his view of the situation. The Germans, he said, had sufficient forces to make three great attacks. This was the first. If the Allies held them off—as they would—the final victory would follow very soon. During both the 22nd and 23rd he appeared hardly to share the anxiety of his staff.

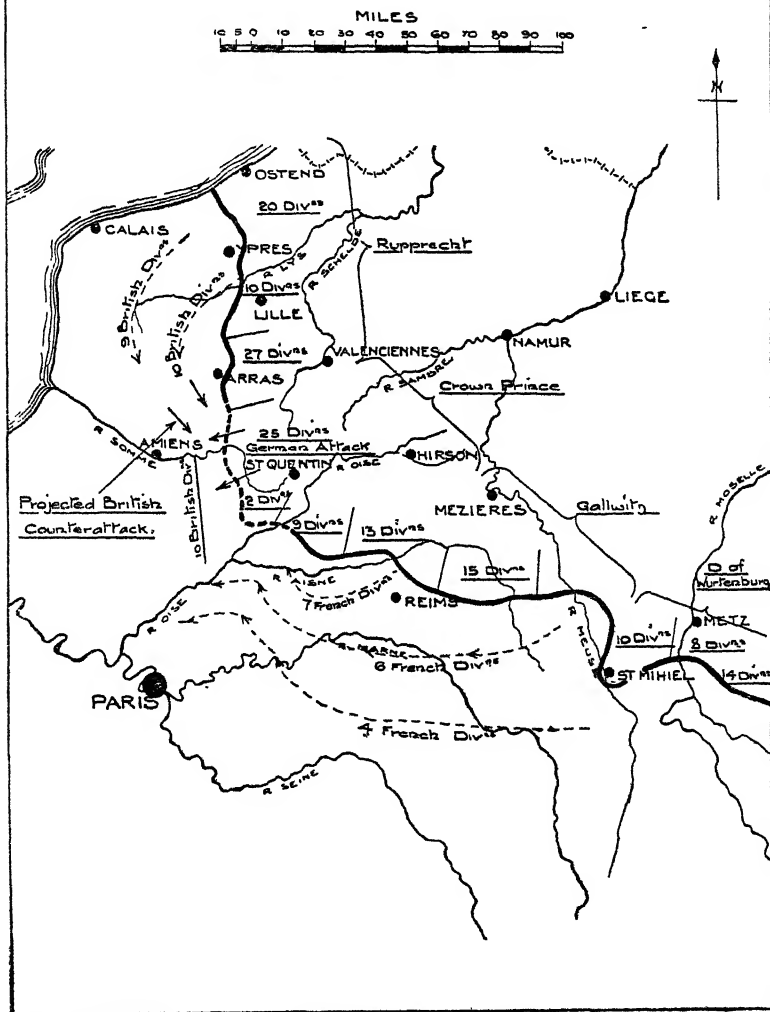
Calm, decisive and impassive, he received, scrutinized and gave curt orders, as each successive message told its sad tale of loss of ground and men and guns. Only by very slight signs did he give evidence of undue preoccupation. He allowed himself to be interrupted at meal-time to converse personally on the telephone with one of his Army Commanders, but he did not forget to apologize to those who were present at the table for the untimely interruption.

On the darkest day of all (Sunday, March 24th), he appeared as usual at the church service on the ramparts of Montreuil. Duncan, the minister, taking a risk that few of those who served under Haig would have ventured to take, said, as the Chief shook hands with him before the service, "I hope things are not too bad, Sir?" "They will never be too bad," replied Haig, and added: "This is what you read to us a few weeks ago in Church, 'Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.'" That same evening he was to face the greatest crisis of the war.

In all military operations there is an inherent weakness at the junction of any two military formations, be they large or small. Adjacent units receive orders from different authorities. Co-ordination becomes difficult. In a withdrawal under pressure of an attack this weakness invariably becomes pronounced, and on the 24th, as the III and V Armies gave ground under the German pressure, a gap, which was rapidly and skilfully exploited by the Germans, developed between the flanks of the two British armies. As the day

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## SITUATION ON MARCH 24<sup>TH</sup> 1918



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wore on the danger in this area became more serious, but steps were taken to meet it, and by evening the situation at this point of junction of the two British Armies, though grave, was only local, and was overshadowed by the menace which now arose at the other, and more important, junction between the French and British armies.

Early in the morning of the 24th the British Staff, adhering to Haig's instructions, got into touch with General Fayolle, and was then informed that the new French troops would not be available for some days, but that Fayolle was prepared to order a counter-attack with such troops as he could provide, to try and restore the situation south of Péronne, where the enemy had only succeeded in crossing in a few places to the west bank of the river. This attack, however, never took place. Late in the evening of the 24th Haig once more met Pétain. A situation infinitely more dangerous than any that had as yet befallen the Allies in France confronted him. Pétain was still convinced that the main German attack had not yet been delivered, but that it would fall in Champagne. He was ready to do what he could to keep touch with the British Army, but he told Haig definitely that he had issued orders to Fayolle that if the enemy continued to press his attacks on Amiens the French divisions were to fall back south-west to cover Paris.

The full import of the French Commander's decision was at once clear to Haig. Although the progress made by the Germans had been great, it had not, so far, disturbed him seriously. With his own experiences of the battles of 1916 and 1917 in his mind, he was well aware that the German attack with its great superiority of numbers must make a deep indentation in his line. His plans had taken into full account much that had occurred. There had been untoward incidents—the crossing of the marshes by the Germans had been unexpected; the abandonment of the Péronne bridge-head had been twenty-four hours sooner than he had expected; but, on the other hand, all reports from the front showed clearly that the moral of the British troops was still high.

So long as the plans for mutual support which he and Pétain had agreed on were executed, and the French divisions

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which he had been promised moved rapidly to strengthen and support the point of junction of the two Allied Armies, there was no reason to anticipate the development of a dangerously critical situation. Haig was still convinced that the German attack could be stayed before the achievement of final success, and, if checked, he was equally convinced that the integral error of the German strategy in committing the whole army—already past its zenith—must inevitably result in irreparable disaster.

Pétain's decision, which was now revealed, was momentous. Not only did it mean the abandonment of the plan which had been mutually arranged between the two Commanders-in-Chief, but it threatened the reversal of the whole strategy of the Allied Armies throughout the war. For the past three years the guiding principle had been the maintenance of the union between the French and British Armies, and Haig realized that the severance of the two forces would give the Germans the very opportunity which they sought. It was the solitary contingency which could now crown Ludendorff's "gambler's-throw" with success—and success of such a nature that, in all human probability, the whole Allied cause would be lost.

The crisis was fierce and menacing; every hour was precious. At any time the Germans might renew their attack. Prompt and decisive action was essential. There was no time to seek a reconsideration of the French decision by the customary method of reference to the civil authorities. There was no hope of obtaining relief by arguments. Nor could any help be expected from the Executive War Board at Versailles. It belied its name, for it had no executive powers. It might advise, but there was little hope of the advice being accepted, even if so cumbrous a body as a committee could arrive at a prompt and correct decision.

To Haig's mind there was but one means whereby even at the eleventh hour the danger could be averted. The control must be taken out of Pétain's hands, and the hands into which it should pass must be those of a single individual, and that individual a trained soldier who should have supreme power, independent of all political interference until the



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crisis was passed and the danger averted. A mere change in the personality of the French Commander-in-Chief would not provide a solution, for Pétain had indicated that his proposal was the result of orders from the French Government itself. There was little likelihood of that Government's agreeing to his supersession by another commander who would dispute its authority.

To Haig it seemed as though only one course could avert disaster. The whole operations of the Allies must, until the crisis was past, be placed under the control of one man—and that man a soldier who would appreciate the whole import of the German plan, and take effective steps to counter it. It would be useless to try and prevail on the French to accept a British Generalissimo. The new leader must be found in the French Army, and he must have both the prestige and the strength to resist the pressure of the French Government, if that proved necessary.

There was but one man from whom such conduct could be hoped. Haig and Foch had been together in many of the hard-fought fields of the previous years, and Haig knew that with Foch action would be prompt and decisive, and that he would be ready to resist the disastrous proposal to separate the French and British Armies with the same resolution as Haig himself.

Once his mind was made up, his action was swift and decisive. To obtain such an appointment he realized that he would have to throw into the scales his own independence of action. He knew that there would not be lacking those who would taunt him with the abandonment of a course which he had always favoured and with the acceptance of a position which he had in previous years so strenuously resisted, but this counted for nothing with him. The Allied cause must be saved; and there was but one way of saving it. He returned with all speed to his own Headquarters, and the moment he arrived despatched to London an urgent telegram asking the British War Minister and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to come forthwith to France with a view to the appointment of Foch to take charge of all the operations on the Western Front.

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There is no episode in Haig's whole career that brings into higher relief all the qualities which contributed to his strength of character than his action on this fateful afternoon. The calm, analytical mind, summing up and weighing every factor, the rapid and unfaltering decision, the prompt action, the total disregard of all personal interests, and the complete confidence that his action would produce the desired results.

Only one doubt remained after the despatch of the telegram—whether action in London and Paris would be rapid enough to cope with the emergency, and he tried to forestall the ill effects of any delay by urgent letters delivered by hand to Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, and to Foch, the responsible military adviser of the French Government. In these he pointed out the obvious intention of the enemy to separate the Allied Armies, and urged that at least twenty French divisions should be sent within reach of the vital point of junction to ensure the union of the French and British forces. He reiterated his statement that there could now be no danger of any great attack on the Champagne front for many weeks to come, as almost every available German division was either engaged on the British front, or had been located close in its neighbourhood.

Not content even with these measures, he ordered his Northern Army Commanders to thin out their lines to the barest skeleton, and send every man who could be spared to provide a force to safeguard the point of junction with the French. With deep satisfaction he noted how loyally Plumer and Horne responded to his appeal. Plumer, the same Plumer who, years before, had conducted Haig's final examination at the Staff College, promised three divisions within three days. It was well that Haig took this precaution, for no French assistance materialized until April 11th.

Meantime, to Haig's anxiety as to the higher strategy of the war was added grave news from his own front line. The efforts of the Germans to exploit the gap which had developed between the III and V British armies on the 24th were renewed on the 25th, and by evening the greater portion of the defensive line along the river was lost, and there were no

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reserves to restore the situation. The Germans, however, were not in a position to press their advantage, and by night-fall of the 26th the crisis in that area was past.

The critics of the future may belittle the effects of Haig's decision on the grounds that the Generalissimo took no immediate steps to protect the point of junction of the two Armies, and that actually it was the British troops themselves that provided the security required. Nor can it be denied that the appointment of the Generalissimo did not forthwith produce the results the desire for which had been the immediate cause of Haig's action.

But the justification of his policy is to be found in the fact that Haig realized that, great though the immediate threat on the field of battle was, there lay behind the decision of Pétain and the French Government an even greater danger. The whole strategy of the previous years of war was being reversed, and even if the imminent danger of division did not develop or was averted, it would undoubtedly recur. The March attack was only the precursor: it was but the first of the three great German attacks which Haig clearly foresaw, and the same threat would reappear with each succeeding attack.

There was another reason for Haig's action. On March 24th he still hoped to deliver an early counter-attack against the flank of the German salient formed by the German advance. He was forced to abandon this intention and divert the troops to bolster up the point of junction of the Allied Armies, but if the French had fulfilled their appointed rôle this counter-attack might have borne important fruits.

In London the authorities had acted as promptly as Haig. The British Government, itself a prey to grave anxiety as the news from the front reached London, had even before receiving Haig's telegram decided to send the War Minister to France to report on the situation. Late in the afternoon of the 26th, Milner and Wilson reached Haig's Headquarters, and were at once closeted in consultation with the Commander-in-Chief. Haig urged that immediate steps should be taken to endow Foch with authority to overrule Pétain, and prevent a course which must inevitably be fraught

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with the gravest risk, if not indeed with the certainty of disaster to the Allied cause.

A meeting was arranged to take place at Doullens on the following day, with the President of the French Republic and the French Prime Minister. There were present :

M. Poincaré	Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig
M. Clemenceau	General Sir Henry Wilson
General Foch	Lord Milner
General Pétain	General Sir Herbert Lawrence
General Weygand	General Sir Archibald Montgomery

In times of supreme crisis even councils of war are occasionally capable of swift action. The ten men who met at Doullens were under the shadow of the threat of imminent disaster. Whatever orders the French Government may have given to Pétain when he made his amazing decision to retire south-west and cover Paris, no two opinions existed now. Amiens must be covered, and the Allied Armies must remain united. On that head there was complete agreement, and Clemenceau, after a brief preliminary conversation with Lord Milner, drafted a resolution appointing Foch "to co-ordinate operations of all Allied Forces to cover Amiens, and to ensure that the French and British flanks remained united."

Haig was not, however, satisfied with this. Something more drastic than mere co-ordination of one portion of the operations was necessary. He had no faith in half measures. Clemenceau's proposal from Haig's point of view was worthless in that it would have constituted Foch practically the subordinate both of Pétain and himself. At once he intervened with the definite proposal that Foch should have control not only of the Amiens portion of the battle, but of the whole Allied force on the Western Front. The area of Foch's jurisdiction was ultimately extended to the whole front, as Haig desired, but the term "co-ordination" was retained, with, as will be seen, the precise results that Haig anticipated.

The action which Haig took in subordinating his own personal position in order to obtain the appointment of a

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Generalissimo has gained from the world more general admiration than any other of his actions. Foch, in his introduction to the published edition of Haig's Despatches, says :

" Was it not the insight of an experienced and enlightened Commander which led him to intervene, as he did, with his own Government on the 24th March, 1918, and with the Allied Governments, assembled at Doullens on the 26th, to the end that the French and British Armies in France and Flanders might at once be placed under a single command, even though his personal position should thereby suffer ? "

As has been shown, Haig's action was the logical outcome of a characteristic analysis and examination of all factors of the situation. It was no sudden change of view or departure from principle.

The problem of the best system for the command of the Allied Armies was no new one to him. He had been face to face with it throughout the period of his own tenure of the command of the British Armies. A year before he had opposed just such an appointment as he was now asking for, and his opposition had been justified by the outcome of events. He had made no attempt during the months that had elapsed to conceal his conviction that the most effective solution of the problem of command of the Allied Forces was close and intimate co-operation between the Allied Commanders-in-Chief. As late as February he had criticized the proposal to place even a limited number of men, as a General Reserve, under any authority independent of the Commanders-in-Chief in the field. Now on March 24th we find him the ardent advocate of the abandonment of a system which he had previously championed.

To Haig the primary requirement was " unity of purpose." A unified command was in itself only a means to that end. It was an obvious method and at first sight the most direct. He had not ignored the fact that the same general objections to unity of command ruled in 1918 as had evoked his opposition to the scheme in 1917. With allied armies the disadvantages must ever be glaring and obvious. No nation willingly submits its manhood to the disposal of another authority independent of its own control. The hard pressure

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of circumstances may compel unwilling acceptance, but the antipathy to any such proposal remains an ever-present cause of friction, and no commander, however fair-minded, can wholly free himself of the national prejudice. A commander would be more than human if he did not prefer to see the heaviest burden of hardship and loss borne by the army of his allies, and it would be equally unnatural for him to leave them the major share of the credit for an allied success. Nor will the army of any nation readily repose in any foreign leader the same trust and confidence that it so readily accords to its own fellow-countryman: and without trust in its leader an army is half way to defeat.

Never for a moment did Haig lose sight of these adverse factors, and yet on that fateful March day he was forced to disregard them in order to ensure, by the only method which his logical mind revealed to him, the "unity of purpose" which was the essential and urgent requirement of the crisis.

If he is entitled—as indeed he is—to the tributes which have been so freely paid to his self-abnegation in sacrificing his own position to achieve his aim, he deserves still higher praise for a deed which, to a man of his stamp, called for a greater act of renunciation: the surrender of a principle which experience and consideration had convinced him was the best under normal circumstances.

It was not that he anticipated from Foch any insight deeper than his own into the correct conduct of operations. He foresaw no flights of genius. His confidence in his own judgment was not for a moment weakened. His comment on the man who was to be placed in supreme control and on the man whose action necessitated the change was significant: "Foch," he said, "is sound and strong. Hitherto Pétain has always been willing and prompt, but in this last fortnight his decisions have been slow and uncertain."

At the very moment that the conference was taking place the Germans were attacking towards the point of junction of the French and British Armies, and threatening the railway communications at Montdidier, and the position had become extremely critical. There was no trained reserve—either British or French—available. General Gough had indeed

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hastily improvised a mixed force of tunnelling companies, army troops, survey companies, and Canadian and American engineers and stragglers to hold, under General Carey, the line of the old Amiens defences between Mezières and Hamel, but not much could be expected from a force of this nature, however courageous and however skilfully handled.

Two days later, on the 28th, the Germans made a supreme effort against Arras, and were completely and decisively repulsed by the British, and Ludendorff definitely abandoned his efforts against the British line. The sting had now gone from the German attack. Haig's dispositions had effectively foiled the main German effort—the blow, which Ludendorff has defined as “an attack between Arras and Péronne towards the coast with a view to separating the bulk of the British Army from the French and crowding it back to the sea,” had failed.

Haig's plan of holding Vimy and Arras in great strength and risking ground on his right flank had been fully justified ; but though successful in diverting the direction of the main German blow and in resisting it, the British Army had met with a grave reverse on its right flank. It had suffered enormous losses in men and in material, and for a time the whole success or failure of the Allied cause hung in the balance. Such a result demands careful investigation of the dispositions which Haig had made prior to the attack and of the considerations which had impelled him to take the risk. In his own Despatches he has set forth at considerable length the reasons to which he attributes the deep withdrawal on the right flank of his battle front, which resulted in the enormous losses in men and material. The first and principal reason was the inadequacy of the forces at the disposal of V Army. With the large extension of the British front during February, Haig had been obliged to select from his battle line some portion which would have to be held in reduced strength. He had not enough troops to allow him to secure the whole length of front. The extent of the front to be attacked had been clearly defined by the information obtained by the Intelligence Service and by air reconnaissance, but he had considered it necessary to secure the safety of the vital portions

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of his line, to which the Germans might well—and in fact did—divert their effort should they fail to achieve success in their first great attack. Until battle was joined the enemy's reserves would not be finally committed.

On the southern portion of Haig's line there was ground which he could afford to surrender. Troops holding it could fall back fighting to meet the reinforcements which would be sent to them. Haig had arranged (see p. 308) with Pétain for a force of sixteen French divisions to be moved to the assistance of his Army should it be attacked while the French front was inactive, and he had relied on this support. Time and men had been lacking to complete the whole of the defensive system on the V Army front, of which a large section had only been taken over from the French some seven weeks before the fateful 21st March. Both the French and British portions of the line had been lightly held during the winter, and the defences were not as complete as those on other sectors of the British front. Of the limited labour available, he had concentrated the major part on the construction of the Péronne bridge-head defences, and he had relied on the marshes of the River Oise, which during this time of year were usually impracticable for operations, and even impassable for individuals.

While he had correctly judged that the Germans would direct their main blow on the area towards Arras, and the district immediately south of it, which would give them the direct line to the coast, in certain particulars his assumptions had been falsified. The marshes had proved practicable; the Péronne bridge-head was not completed, and had to be abandoned without the full resistance which Haig had anticipated, and in consequence the fighting had become disorganized and the German advance more rapid.

The assistance which he had anticipated from the French had not been forthcoming; the dislocation at the points of junction between the III and V Armies had not been foreseen.

He had relied with confidence on the fighting powers of the British troops, and on their moral, and from all sources there had reached him indisputable evidence of the heroism with which the troops had fought and of the amazing fact



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that the spirit of the men had risen rather than diminished during the anxious days of the great German attack. The Chief Field Censor reported to Haig that judging by letters written home the moral of the men, so far from being impaired by the hardships and the casualties, had actually improved. There had been an immediate improvement in the general tone of the men's letters from the very day that the German attack had commenced. Confidence had replaced grumbling, and so far as this test could be relied on, at no period of the war had the moral been higher.

Ludendorff claims, and with justice, that the effort of the German Army was a brilliant feat. His operations had been carefully planned and executed with determination, yet by 4th April he records that : " It was an established fact that the enemy's resistance was beyond our strength," and that : " General Headquarters had to take the extreme and difficult decision of abandoning the attack on Amiens for good. . . . Strategically," he continues, " we did not achieve what the events of 23rd, 24th and 25th had encouraged us to hope for."

Much criticism from the British Press has been directed at the time and since against General Gough, in command of the V Army. Haig gave no support to any such criticism. As early as April 3rd Mr. Lloyd George visited the front, and gave Haig the impression that he was anticipating attack in the House of Commons for his delay in dealing with the question of effectives and man-power, and for his disregard of the advice of his military advisers against the Palestine operations. He evidently intended to make Gough a scape-goat for the retreat of the V Army. Haig would not admit that Gough had in any way failed. He had had a very long line, and few reserves, when the enemy's attack fell upon his Army ; but throughout a most critical fortnight he had never lost his head.

Haig refused to remove Gough, and it was only when a direct order was received from home, which Haig could not disregard, that he allowed Gough to give up his command in the field. To the end he bitterly resented the action of those who had insisted on Gough's removal. Even the changes in the Staff by order of the Government in January had not

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stirred his resentment so deeply. He went white with anger, and for a time contemplated resignation himself rather than submit to the order.

He maintained that the disaster which had overtaken the V Army was due to the action of those who were now trying to make Gough their scapegoat, rather than to any failure of the Army Commander himself.

Only his own conviction that he himself was essential to his country's success, and the earnest entreaties of those around him, prevailed upon Haig to remain at his post.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### UNIFIED COMMAND

THE hopes which Haig had entertained that the appointment of a Generalissimo would lead to an immediate change in the situation or to the prompt movement of French troops to the threatened area, where the hard-pressed British Army was still resisting unsupported the whole weight of the German effort, were doomed to disappointment.

There was, indeed, the comforting assurance from all present at the Conference at Doullens on March 26th that the first and most urgent matter was to accelerate the movement of the French troops to the battlefield, but in actual fact no such "speeding up" occurred, and it was the British divisions, drawn from the Northern line, and not the French Army, that strengthened the wearied British battle line.

Further conferences were held on 29th and 30th March, and on 1st April, between Haig, Foch and Clemenceau, at which Haig continued to press for measures to hasten the arrival of the French troops, but these were equally unproductive of results. There was complete agreement as to the urgency of the case, but there was no action. Nor was the reason difficult to find. The fault lay in no way with the Generalissimo. It rapidly became apparent that Pétain (still Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies) was not prepared to accept whole-heartedly the position and duties assigned to Foch, or to respect the rather vague authority implied in the term "co-ordination," and there did not appear to be any machinery existing to enforce his acquiescence. To him alone belonged the power of issuing executive orders to the French troops.

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Another conference between the representatives of the Governments became necessary, to give more precise and clear definition to the relative positions of the existing leaders. It met at Beauvais on April 3rd. Again Haig took the lead, and at his suggestion it was decided to entrust to Foch the strategical direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French and American Armies were to remain in full control of the tactical action of their respective Armies. Each Commander-in-Chief was to have the right of appeal to his Government if, in his opinion, the Army was endangered by reason of any orders received from the Generalissimo.

The importance of this decision was twofold. As far as Foch and Pétain were concerned, the substitution of "strategical direction" for "co-ordination" definitely conferred on Foch the power of issuing direct executive orders to the French Army through its Commander-in-Chief. As far as Haig was concerned the proviso of the right of appeal embodied in the loose phrase "endangering the British Army" merely involved a reversion to the relationship which had existed at the time that Haig had assumed command of the British Army, when, owing to the greatly superior strength of the French Army, Haig, like his predecessor, had always been prepared to accept the views of General Joffre on general strategy.

Foch's own position, however, was materially different from that of Joffre in 1916. Joffre had had to concern himself not only with the strategical direction of the armies in France, but also with the immediate command of the French Armies in the Field. In the latter capacity he was directly responsible to the French Government. Foch, on the other hand, had no concern with the direct command and administration of the French Army in the Field, and consequently he was no longer directly responsible to the French Government, but to the Supreme War Council, comprising the Prime Ministers of the various States. He was, in fact, virtually independent of civilian control.

In spite of this classification of responsibilities, for another week nothing was done to ease the burden borne by Haig

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and the British Armies. There could now be little question of any immediate attack on the French front, since the great majority of the available German divisions were identified and located on the British front.

Nevertheless, no action was taken by the French Armies either to take over line from the British or to attack themselves, or even to send reserves to support the British front. With the exception of one small minor and unsuccessful counter-attack, immediately on the British right, the French Armies were still inactive, when, on April 9th, a further severe attack was launched against the British front—this time between Armentières and the La Bassée Canal.

The attack opened against a portion of the line thinly held by the Portuguese Army, and spread rapidly, and by the evening of the 11th the attack had developed as far north as Messines and had penetrated deeply into the British line. On April 11th Merville fell, and at one time the reports which Haig received indicated that even Hazebrouck could not be expected to withstand the German attack.

Haig was again gravely concerned. By interchange of his divisions between the active and inactive portions of his front line he had made good his resistance against an immense superiority of German troops, but by now every one of his divisions had been employed again and again in violent battle.

There must be a limit to the power of endurance even of the British Army. Although reinforcements in the form of drafts were now reaching him, they were not yet sufficient to replace the yawning gap, and they were, moreover, largely composed of untrained or only partially trained men.

On 9th and 10th April, Haig renewed his effort to induce Foch to direct the French troops to take some share of the battle, either by taking over line, or by sending reinforcements, but it was not until April 10th that Foch took action. On that day, at Beaurepaire, he told Haig that he had at last made up his mind that the main German attack was being made against the British, and that he would move a large French force to take part in the battle.

A few days later, on April 15th, the first French troops

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began to arrive by road and rail, and were at once put into the line at Kemmel, one of the strongest positions of the line. The result was somewhat unexpected. Within a week a German attack was delivered and Kemmel fell.

The wearied British Army which for 25 days, from March 21st to April 15th, had unsupported met and fought to a standstill the onslaught of 106 German divisions, now saw with bitter disappointment the fresh French troops, who had at last relieved them, lose one of the strongest positions in the whole battle area. Nevertheless the arrival of the first of these French troops, and the information that many more were being hurried to the front, eased the situation.

It was when partially relieved of this terrible anxiety by the knowledge that his wearied but still steadfast troops would not be asked to bear unaided the whole burden of the German assault much longer that Haig penned the order that will remain graven on the hearts of the British race as long as the records of great achievements stir the souls of mankind.

### TO ALL RANKS OF THE BRITISH FORCES IN FRANCE.

Three weeks ago to-day the Enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a 50 mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel ports and destroy the British Army.

In spite of throwing already 106 Divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals.

We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

Many amongst us now are tired. To those I would say that Victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out! Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing

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in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our Homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.

D. HAIG,  
F. M.

*Thursday,*  
*11th April, 1918.*

At Ypres in 1914, when his own I Corps had endured almost to the limit of its power a period of stress not unlike that which the whole British Army was undergoing in 1918, and when at last Haig had heard that relief was at hand, he had issued an order, which, while less well known, is written in almost similar terms.

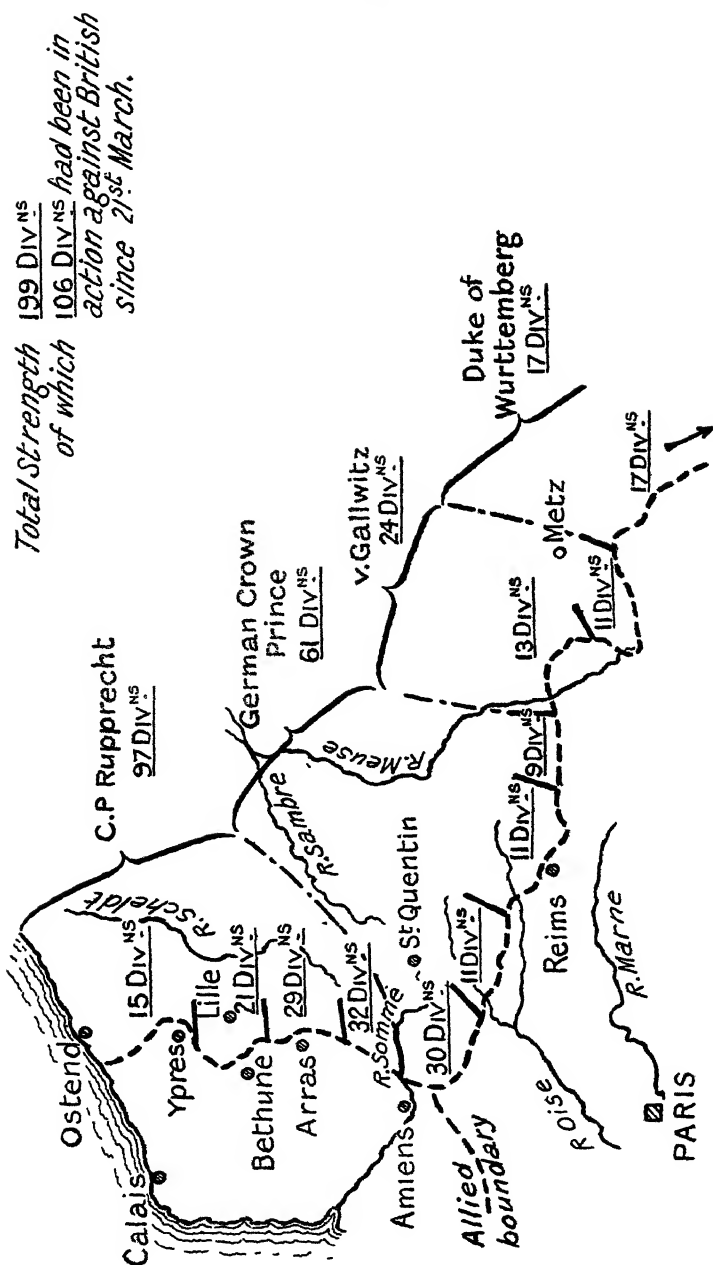
On that April day in 1918 he had spent many hours in visiting his troops. As he returned in his motor car he had been met by his orderly with his horse some miles from Headquarters. He had mounted, and with his mind more free of anxiety than it had been for many days, he had indulged for an hour in the only relaxation which he allowed himself in periods of strain—a cross-country gallop. On arrival at Headquarters he went straight to his room, sat down alone at his table, and wrote the Order, which on the following day was issued to the Army.

A few days previously the state of affairs at the front had prevented him from attending Sunday service, and in the midst of all his preoccupation he found time to send his chaplain a note. "I missed my Sunday service greatly, but it could not be helped."

While our sympathy is naturally with Haig and the British Army during this period of extreme anxiety, it is only fair to Foch to state that his refusal to respond to Haig's repeated attempts to obtain support was due, not to any desire to save the French Army from the stress of the fighting, but solely to an incorrect estimation of the strategical situation.

Throughout the whole of April Foch repeatedly expressed the view that the Germans would resume the attack on the Arras-Amiens-Montdidier front, that the operations in Flanders were not a serious effort, and that no German attack

## German Order of Battle on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1918





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in force would materialize north of Montdidier. All his dispositions were made on this assumption.

As we now know, both from Ludendorff's book\* and from the actual outcome of events, the forecasts were erroneous.

The attack on Amiens was finally abandoned by the end of March, and Ludendorff resolved to transfer his blow to the Lys. All preparations for the Arras attack had long been completed. Prince Rupprecht, who commanded the German group of armies opposite the Lys front, had indeed urged on Ludendorff that the main German effort should be made there, and not on the Arras-Amiens front, but Ludendorff had negatived the proposal mainly on the grounds that "before the middle of April the state of the ground might not enable troops to leave the road." The exceptionally dry spring had enabled him to advance the date by a few days.

Haig's view of the probable German action differed from that of Foch. From the time when the German attacks towards the Arras-Amiens front were suspended he had sought to divine the German plans. Like Foch, he had believed that the Germans could not afford to abandon the offensive. They must attack somewhere, and he had formed the definite opinion that they would seek to exhaust the British and French reserves by successive attacks in Flanders and on the Aisne, and would then, if conditions still remained favourable to them, seek to deliver a final and decisive attack against the British either in Flanders or against the Arras-Amiens front.

Information that reached General Headquarters by the middle of April left little doubt but that an attack on the Aisne front was impending. When, therefore, the arrival of the fresh French troops towards the end of April enabled five British divisions to be sent to the French front for a period of rest, Haig heard with some concern that Foch proposed to send them to the very portion of the French front where they would again be involved in active battle.

An officer of the British Intelligence Staff was at once despatched to French General Headquarters to explain Haig's reasons for anticipating the Aisne attack, but the

\* Ludendorff, pp. 590 and 616.

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French did not concur, and the exhausted British divisions found themselves within a few days of their arrival on the Aisne involved in another heavy battle on this front.\*

By the beginning of May the Battle of the Lys had expended itself and the series of attacks on the British Army were for the time at an end, and Haig was able to take stock of the situation. His army was exhausted but still intact, and with unimpaired moral. Lack of reinforcements had caused him to disband no fewer than eight divisions; five more divisions had been sent to the French front. There remained under his own immediate command only forty-five divisions, and even these were below establishment; but reinforcements were at last beginning to arrive in satisfactory and increasing numbers. Within a few weeks he would be able to reconstitute his armies, and for these few weeks the French Army, which had not yet been heavily engaged during 1918, could be relied on to repel any German attacks. The American Army, though rapidly increasing in numbers, was not yet fit to take the field in any strength. Although the Germans had used up the bulk of their army in the attack on the British, they had still a very large number of divisions in reserve—estimated by both Haig and Foch at seventy-five, but actually about fifty. The initiative still rested with the enemy, but it was now only a matter of a few months before the arrival of more American troops would restore it to the Allies.

Reports from Germany showed that the spirit of the German nation, though encouraged by the news of the fighting, and the advance made by their armies, was still far from satisfactory for the German High Command.

From the Eastern theatres there came news which, if not important, was encouraging. There were signs that the Bulgarians were getting weary of war. In Palestine the British had attacked across the Jordan, before the withdrawal of troops to France had put an end to their operations. In Mesopotamia the British were pressing onwards.

\* It is interesting to note that Ludendorff has given exact confirmation to Haig's analysis of the situation. The front Ypres-Bailleul was too strongly held for further attack. The Somme area afforded too little room. There remained the Aisne front, which Ludendorff "hoped would lead to such heavy drain on the resources of the enemy as would enable us to resume the attack on Flanders."

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It was obvious that the German High Command, now deeply committed to an offensive policy on the Western Front, must seek to take advantage of the few weeks of superiority that remained to them by endeavouring to press home their advantage. Equally, the policy of the Allies was to tide over without serious losses the period of danger until the growth of the British and American Armies would enable them to resume their offensive. There could, as yet, be no question of attack: the Allies must still be content to remain on the defensive.

The strategic problem was when and where would the Germans strike? Now that the German attack on the British front seemed definitely at an end, Foch, and not Haig, had to decide that problem.

When the great results that were to follow are remembered, it is somewhat astonishing to find how often the deductions and forecasts of the Allied Generalissimo were at fault during these few months.

In the early part of April, when Ludendorff was attacking the British with all his strength, Foch anticipated a renewed German attack towards Amiens and Montdidier, and made his dispositions accordingly. Now, when he expected the attack on the British to be renewed, Ludendorff struck hard at Rheims.\*

On May 27th the third great German offensive was delivered between Noyon and Rheims. It made great progress at first, bringing the German line to the Marne, but by the end of June this attack, like its predecessors, had come to an end without achieving its purpose.† The Allied line, though again deeply indented, still held, and the arrival of American troops had more than counterbalanced the reserves which had been thrown into the fight. Already the inevitable result, foreseen by Haig, of these titanic but unsuccessful attacks of the Germans was beginning to press on the German leaders. Their forces were expended, their armies greatly weakened in moral as well as numbers, the

\* Ludendorff, in his "War Memories," has confirmed the accuracy of Haig's forecast (pp. 615-16).

† During June also the Austrian attack on the Italian front totally failed.

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Allies' strength was still maintained; the influx of the American troops must soon finally weigh down the balance against the Germans. They had no longer sufficient strength to attack, and to abandon the offensive was not only to admit defeat but to court disaster. "The offensive," writes Ludendorff, "makes less demand on the men and involves no higher losses—and all weaknesses in an army become more prominent in the defensive. Again and again," he tells us, "our thoughts returned to the idea of an offensive in Flanders, but an offensive at this point still presented too difficult a problem. We had to postpone it." He resolved on yet another attack in force to be delivered during the middle of July on the French front from Château-Thierry–Rheims–Verdun, to be followed, if events justified the move, by an attack on the Flanders front a fortnight later.

On the 15th July the German attack was delivered, but made little progress,\* and by the 17th was definitely held up. On July 17th and 18th Foch delivered his great counter-attack, and by the end of the month the Germans had been driven back to the line of the Aisne. Whether he wished it or not, Ludendorff had now no alternative. His army was at the end of its powers. Each successive attack had achieved a little less than its predecessors. His army was rapidly weakening, that of his enemy was steadily increasing. With all its dangers, the Germans must now perforce abandon their attacks and await those of the Allies. "By the beginning of August," he records, "we had reverted to the defensive on the whole front."

"The complete success," says Haig in his Despatches, "of the Allied counter-attack on 18th July near Soissons marked the turning-point in the year's campaign and commenced the second phase of the Allied operations. Thereafter the initiative lay with the Allies and the growing superiority of their forces enabled them to roll back the tide of invasion with ever-increasing swiftness. At this point and in this connection I would like to pay my personal tribute to the promptitude and determination of the French Marshal, in whose hand the co-ordination of the action of the Allied

\* Approximately three miles.

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Armies was placed." No more generous tribute was ever paid by one leader to another.

There had been mistakes in the effort to discern the German plan. Haig's own warning had been disregarded, and in consequence some of his own troops had suffered heavily on the Aisne. The refusal of Foch to believe until April 10th that the main German effort was being made against the British had resulted in such strain on the British Army that it had nearly reached breaking-point. To Haig's mind, however, these were but incidents. "We all of us in war," he had written in 1910, "make mistakes and find ourselves in desperately critical situations." If the French Marshal's insight into the German mind had been less penetrating than that of Haig himself, Foch had, nevertheless, shown unfaltering determination, and a courage as high as his own.

To the vacillation and endless disunion between military and civil command there had succeeded clear-cut and prompt decision, an immediate readiness to revise preconceived opinion in the light of actual and incontestable facts; above all, the soldier's conception that losses must be faced if victory was to be won was now for the first time predominant in the higher direction of the armed forces of the Allies. "I can deal with a man," said Haig, "but not with a committee," and Foch was a man and a soldier.

Haig himself had not only given most loyal support to Foch, but had stood between him and civilian interference from London. When Foch had required Haig to send British divisions as a temporary measure to the French front, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had intervened with a telegram to Haig saying, "This would result in the loss of identity of the British Army," and added: "I presume you are refusing." Haig had not responded to the suggestion. He pointed out to the Government that they must accept the consequences of their action at Beauvais. They had accepted a Generalissimo to meet a crisis, and so long as Foch had to carry the weight of responsibility for the Allied Armies there must be no interference with his plans.

But while he thus prevented interference with Foch's plans, he was careful to safeguard the integrity of the British

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Army. A measure of this nature might be necessary owing to temporary emergencies, but must not be taken as a precedent, and while he sent the divisions he had written to Foch that any idea of a permanent "amalgam" of British and French troops must be dismissed as totally unworkable.

The move of these five divisions to the French front was the first of a series. In all thirteen divisions, about one quarter of Haig's force, were sent in the course of seven weeks ;\* and as each move took place and as Foch's demands grew the British Government became increasingly anxious.

On June 9th there had been a violent altercation between Foch and the British Prime Minister, during which the French Marshal had accused Mr. Lloyd George of having done nothing to bring up the effective strength of the British Armies, and the British Prime Minister had indignantly repudiated the accusation, and had even gone the length of saying that the British Government had made great efforts to increase the numbers before March 21st. "And so," commented Haig, "time is wasted in wordy argument, and nothing is done."

Later in the month when Haig again acceded to a further request from Foch for British troops, the Cabinet, gravely concerned, went the length of sending one of their number (General Smuts) to find out Haig's reasons for this compliance. Haig reassured the agitated Minister. The responsibility was his, and he was prepared to accept all the consequences if his judgment proved to be at fault.

Although under the existing agreement the British Government could not overrule Haig's decision to comply with Foch's demands, they became increasingly anxious lest any mishap should occur and they be held responsible, and on June 22nd sent instructions to Haig that if Foch should issue any order which in Haig's opinion would endanger the British troops Haig was to appeal to the British Government, and on 15th July followed this up with a definite

\* *IX Corps* 5 divisions (8th, 21st, 25th, 50th, 19th). Sent to the Aisne front at the end of April and early in May.

2 divisions—South of Somme } During the  
2 divisions—Astride the Somme } Somme Battle.

*XXII Corps* 4 divisions (15th, 34th, 51st, 62nd) to Aisne front on 13th July.  
Total 13 divisions.

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order that, if Haig considered that the British Army was endangered, or if he thought that Foch was not acting solely on military considerations, Haig was at liberty to refuse his requests.

On this order Haig said: "This is a case of heads you win and tails I lose. If things go well, the Government gets the credit—not an unusual thing in war—if badly, I shall be blamed."

Although his comment was bitter, even this anomalous position did not seriously disturb Haig. Already he had begun to discern unmistakable signs that the breakdown of the German fighting power (which he had always foreseen if they persisted in attacks that failed) was proceeding apace. Reinforcements were now arriving steadily. Haig's mind was already concerned with plans for his own attack when the right moment should arrive.

The number of British divisions was steadily mounting up from forty-five to fifty-two. Drafts were being absorbed into the old divisions and the establishment completed. Above all, the artillery lost in the fighting was promptly replaced, and munitions were ample. He could now even allow himself to be mildly amused by the agitation among those in less close touch with events.

By the beginning of July he felt himself strong enough to test the efficiency of the renovated army in a series of small offensive operations, which could serve the double purpose of securing ground necessary for the great operations now taking shape in his mind and of demonstrating how far the fighting power of the Germans had deteriorated.

During the second half of June and early in July at intervals, all along the British front these attacks were delivered, and served to corroborate all Haig's anticipations:\* by the middle of July Haig's mind was made up. The time was nearly ripe. Whatever might happen in the battle now in progress on the French front, the British Army could attack with every hope of success, and on July 13th (three days before Foch counter-attacked on the Aisne) Haig issued definite

\* The most important of these was the capture of Villers-Bretonneux by the Australian Corps, aided by a company of Americans.

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orders to Rawlinson to prepare for an attack in force by the IV Army outwards from Amiens, which was to develop into a decisive attack by all the British Armies.

He submitted his plan to Foch, who accepted it, and ten days later Foch, at a conference with Haig, Pétain and Pershing, gave the final decision that the time had come for the Allies to regain the initiative, and outlined the operations which he had in mind :

1. The French Army were to free the Paris-Avrincourt Railway in the Marne area.
2. The British Army were to free the Paris-Amiens Railway.
3. The Americans were to free the Paris-Avrincourt Railway in the Commercy area by reducing the St. Mihiel salient.

Already Foch's mind was beginning to turn in the same direction as that of Haig. In his Directive of July 24th he had written :

"It is not the moment yet for a general offensive, but to strike redoubled blows and, by separate attacks, varied in time and space, succeeding each other by surprise as rapidly as possible, to increase the disorganization of the enemy and to throw the German High Command into disorder, not leaving it any respite.

"Thereafter, if the attacks succeed and if the season be not too far advanced, it will be a case of foreseeing for the end of the summer or the autumn the general and decisive offensive which will make the whole hostile front crumble.

"The allied armies are at the turning of the road. The moment has come to leave the attitude of general defensive imposed until now by numerical inferiority and to pass to the offensive."

He had little real hope of the great success which was to crown the attack of the British Armies, and to lead to the second paragraph of his directive becoming operative, for on August 11th he was communicating to Wilson his plans "for this year and next." In 1918 he wished "to disengage the lateral railways at Amiens and Hazebrouck, Compiègne and St. Mihiel." He was planning for 1919 "to seize the



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Boche railway of Lille-Hirson-Mezières-Metz," and when that was completed he "thought he could deal with the Boches, as it were, in two theatres—north and south."

Meantime, the view of the War Office of the probable course of events was very different. On July 28th Wilson submitted to the Cabinet over his own signature a paper which he had had prepared to outline his conception of the correct military policy of Great Britain for 1918 and 1919. If ever the paper is published in full it will make interesting reading.

After a detailed discussion of the various factors it arrives at six conclusions :

1. That for the remainder of 1918 and during the early months of 1919 we should gain ground and prepare for further operations at a later date in the West.
2. That in the meantime we should send three divisions to Italy as a General Reserve.
3. That it would be unwise to attempt to gain a decisive victory *until* 1920, and that "therefore July, 1919, should be kept in mind as a date for opening the main offensive campaign."
4. That the troops in Macedonia should be replaced by Indians.
5. That our most urgent consideration was the establishment of British control on the Caspian, and the security of our lines of communication from Bagdad.
6. That the vital consideration for the British Empire was the reconstitution of Russia in some form, as an armed independent state—strong enough to withstand German infiltration.

Nine years later Haig made biting comments on this paper, which he stigmatized as rubbish. It was, he said, difficult to understand how any trained staff officers could have written it, or how a staff holding such eccentric views could be expected to win any victory against a resolute enemy. Fortunately, owing to the appointment of the Generalissimo, the responsibility for operations on the Western Front now rested with Foch and Haig, and the General Staff in London had not at this period any influence on the course of events in France. Yet the paper itself was only a reflection of the views generally held by the War Cabinet. In his diary, Wilson records the discussion on this paper at the meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Empire on 31st July and 1st August.

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He describes how Lord Milner was convinced that we should never beat the Germans, how "practically all the Prime Ministers, Lloyd George, Borden, Hughes (but not so much), Smuts, Massey and Milner are convinced we cannot beat the Boches on the Western Front, and so they go wandering about looking for laurels." On Mr. Hughes (the Prime Minister of Australia), alone of this gathering of distinguished statesmen, would appear to rest the credit of firmly upholding the view of Haig and Robertson, that it was in the West, and the West only, that victory could be won, and that with determined and concentrated effort, victory there was within our grasp.\*

During the months that intervened between the opening of the great German attack and the commencement of the final battles which ended the war, the change in the relative strength of the opposing armies had been very marked. Germany, in spite of every effort that she could make, had been unable to complete her ranks after the casualties that she had suffered in March and April; even the reinforcements from Russia were now at an end. France had remained practically stationary in strength. Great Britain had refilled the gaps in her ranks and had more than replaced her losses in guns and munitions, and the strength of her fighting army, measured in numbers only, was if anything greater than it had been prior to the German attack. But it was the advent of the American Army that had made the most notable change in the relative strengths. When the great German attack opened, there were actually only the First and Second American Divisions available for battle, and these were promptly placed by General Pershing at the full disposal of General Foch. It was, however, not until April 25th that the American forces, in formed bodies, took part in the fighting. On that date the First American Division took its place in the line to the north of Montdidier, and exactly a month later the Division was engaged in a small but very successful action at Cantigny.

This Division was almost entirely drawn from the American Standing Army. Four weeks later, the Second Division, under

\* Wilson: "Life and Diaries," p. 119.

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General Harbord, came into action in a very brilliant feat of arms at Belleau Wood,\* in conjunction with the French Army. Meantime there had been a steady stream of ships crossing the Atlantic and bearing American troops to France. By the 28th July, no fewer than eight American Divisions—totalling two hundred thousand men—were engaged in the battle of Château-Thierry, and already there were under training in France sufficient reinforcements to justify the belief that within a few weeks even these numbers would be doubled.† Behind and beyond these there stood the almost limitless reserves of men in the United States itself, as yet practically untouched by the war. A potential addition to the fighting forces of this nature could not fail to make a great difference in the plans of the commanders on both sides. To the Allies it gave renewed confidence and justified them in accepting risks which, hitherto, prudence would have forced them to refuse. In the minds of the German leaders there could no longer be any hope of any issue more favourable than that of a compromise peace.

Preoccupied though he was with the preparations for the attack from which he hoped so much, Haig did not allow the fourth anniversary of the entry of his country into the war to pass unnoticed. Late in July he had heard from his own chaplain a sermon on the text: "Christ set his face steadfastly up to Jerusalem," and had commented: "Only by trusting in Christ can we have confidence in grave responsibilities."

The next day he summoned the appropriate Staff Officers and directed them to make arrangements for a Special Thanksgiving Service to be held at Montreuil on August 4th to give thanks to God for the guidance of Providence which had brought the Empire and the Army through these four years of toil and strain, and to entreat that it might not be withdrawn until final success crowned their efforts. He

\* Near Château-Thierry.

† Actually, in the final weeks of the war, the American Army was finding over seven hundred thousand men for the front line, and General Pershing, commanding the American Army, reported that he had twenty-nine divisions in action and thirteen more divisions ready to join them.

## UNIFIED COMMAND

desired that it should be undenominational ; that it should be in three parts conducted by Anglican, Roman and Presbyterian divines. " You can draw lots," he said, " as to the order in which they come." The suggestion was made that a Bishop from home should conduct the Anglican part of the service. Promptly and decisively he vetoed it. " No one," he said, " but a chaplain who has seen service with the troops in the front line can interpret the feelings of the Army at such a time as this."

At the same time he issued an Order to his forces and an appeal for the continuance of their loyalty and courage in the future :

" The conclusion of the fourth year of the war marks the passing of a period of crisis. We can now with added confidence look forward to the future.

" The enemy's first and most powerful blows fell on the British. His superiority of force was nearly three to one.

" At the end of four years of war, the magnificent fighting qualities and spirit of our troops remain of the highest order. I thank them for the devoted bravery and unshaken resolution with which they responded to my appeal at the height of the struggle, and I know that they will show a like steadfastness and courage in whatever task they may yet be called upon to perform."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FINAL BATTLES

FROM the moment that the last German offensive was finally checked by the counter-attack on the Aisne, the centre of gravity of the fighting passed definitely to the British front. From that time until the Armistice it was the continuous succession of blows rained on the German forces by the British Army under Haig that caused the German resistance to crumble and finally collapse. The fighting on other parts of the front, though extensive in area, was of secondary intensity.\* It served its purpose as a subsidiary effort, but it had little effect compared with the gigantic battles on the British front. As early as January, 1918, Haig had foreseen that the failure of a great German massed offensive must end in disaster to the Germans (p. 294) ; but few save the British Commander-in-Chief had any conception that the action now beginning under the general direction of Marshal Foch, with strictly limited purpose, could bring Germany to her knees within four months.

Nor had Ludendorff any serious misgivings before the opening of the British attack. "By the beginning of August," he writes, "we had suspended our attack and reverted to the defensive on the whole front. . . . I considered that the enemy might continue his attacks . . . but I further assumed that the operations would only take the form of isolated local attacks" :† and these Ludendorff believed he could defeat,

\* 20th August, French attack on the Aisne. 12th September, reduction of the St. Mihiel salient.

† Ludendorff: "My War Memories," II., p. 678.

## THE FINAL BATTLES

and might even be able to retaliate by counter-strokes, "though on a smaller scale than formerly."

Ludendorff had not gauged incorrectly the intentions of Marshal Foch, who had no more expectation of victory in 1918 at this time than his great German adversary. On July 24th he had issued to the commanders of the three Allied Armies a "directive" for just such isolated and limited attacks as Ludendorff had foreseen. He had ordered the Allied Armies to free the railway systems seized or imperilled by the German advance in March, and he had spoken of the capture of the Lille-Hirson-Mezières Railway as an operation for mid-summer, 1919.

Fortunately for the Allies there was another mind at work on the problem—the mind of Haig, which judged very differently from Foch and Ludendorff—and Haig had already ordered preparations for the great battles that were to begin on August 8th. It was no local attack that Haig designed; for with the armies of the British Empire behind him, and secure in his conviction that the fighting power of the Germans was on the wane, he was resolved to put the matter to the final test. When, as was his wont, he had outlined on the great map in his room the operations which he had in mind, the firm fingers had moved far across the railway zone of Foch's directive. They had penetrated deep into, and even through, the entrenched zone of the German position. The slow, incisive Scottish voice had spoken of the capture of Cambrai, of St. Quentin, of Le Cateau, even of Hirson, the great German railway centre, through which passed more than half the German supply trains that fed their armies. The attack of the IV Army on August 8th was to be followed by attacks of the other British Armies. There was to be no 1919 campaign.

On August 8th at 4.30 a.m. the first great British blow was struck. The crash of massed artillery heralded the moment of assault for which the infantry and attendant tanks were waiting. Eleven divisions under General Rawlinson struck eastward of Amiens on a front of eleven miles, and to the south, an hour later, a subsidiary attack on a front of five miles, by a French army operating under Haig's command, extended the blow. The whole operation was crowned with

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complete success. "August 8th," says Ludendorff, "was the black day of the German Army in the history of the war . . . by the early hours of the afternoon I had gained a complete impression of the situation. It was a very gloomy one. . . . The 8th of August put the decline of the fighting power (of the Germans) beyond all doubt. . . . The war must be ended."

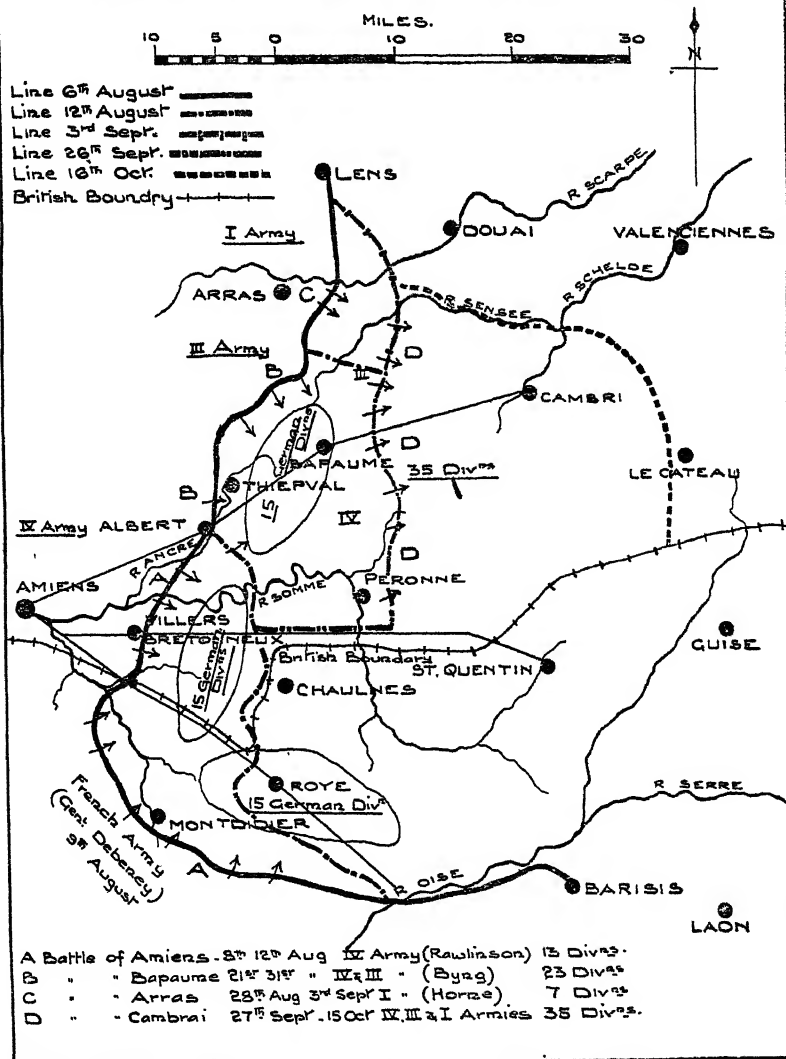
By August 11th, 22,000 prisoners and 400 guns were in British hands, and the British line was advanced close up to the formidable Roye-Chaulnes line; and Haig was telling Wilson that "we ought now to hit as hard as we could, and try to get peace this autumn." Not for another month was Foch converted to Haig's view, and it was nearly the middle of September before he had abandoned his idea of small local attacks, and told the Belgian, British, French and Americans to attack the Hindenburg Line, "as soon as they can, as strong as they can, for as long as they can."

Both the reports from the front line on the 12th August and a personal reconnaissance which Haig made of the Roye-Chaulnes position convinced him that to continue his operations by a direct attack on this heavily entrenched and naturally strong position would, even if successful, be attended by heavy casualties, and he accordingly decided to bring his other armies to the north into play. There ensued a very sharp conflict of opinion between Foch and Haig. The Generalissimo urged direct attack, but Haig refused to give way. A personal and somewhat heated interview between the two leaders failed to obtain agreement, and in the end Haig peremptorily refused to commit his troops to a direct attack on the Roye-Chaulnes position. Faced with this determination, and in view of the fact that the subsequent operations must perforce be primarily the task of the British Army, Foch had no alternative but to concur.

The subsequent operations of the British Armies were in consequence carried out according to the plan of the British Commander-in-Chief. Although in consequence of this difference of opinion Foch had withdrawn the French Army, which had served under him on August 8th, from Haig's command, yet now he was prepared to give assistance, and in

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## BRITISH ATTACKS AUG. 8<sup>TH</sup> TO OCT. 16<sup>TH</sup> 1918.





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order to prevent the Germans moving reinforcements to oppose the British main attack he ordered a subsidiary French attack on the Aisne.

Accordingly on 20th August the British III Army under Byng renewed the battle, while the French on the Aisne attacked on the following day. After ten days of hard fighting it had become clear to Haig that the whole German line was crumbling, and on the 24th he extended his line of attack still further, and launched the I Army under Horne into the battle, and by September 3rd the I Army had advanced into general line with the III and IV Armies, capturing 18,850 prisoners and 200 guns. The effect of these successes extended far beyond the immediate point attacked. The German line now consisted of a series of sharp salients and deep re-entrants, and there were no reinforcements. In an effort to readjust this situation, which was becoming very critical, Ludendorff withdrew his troops from the Lys salient.

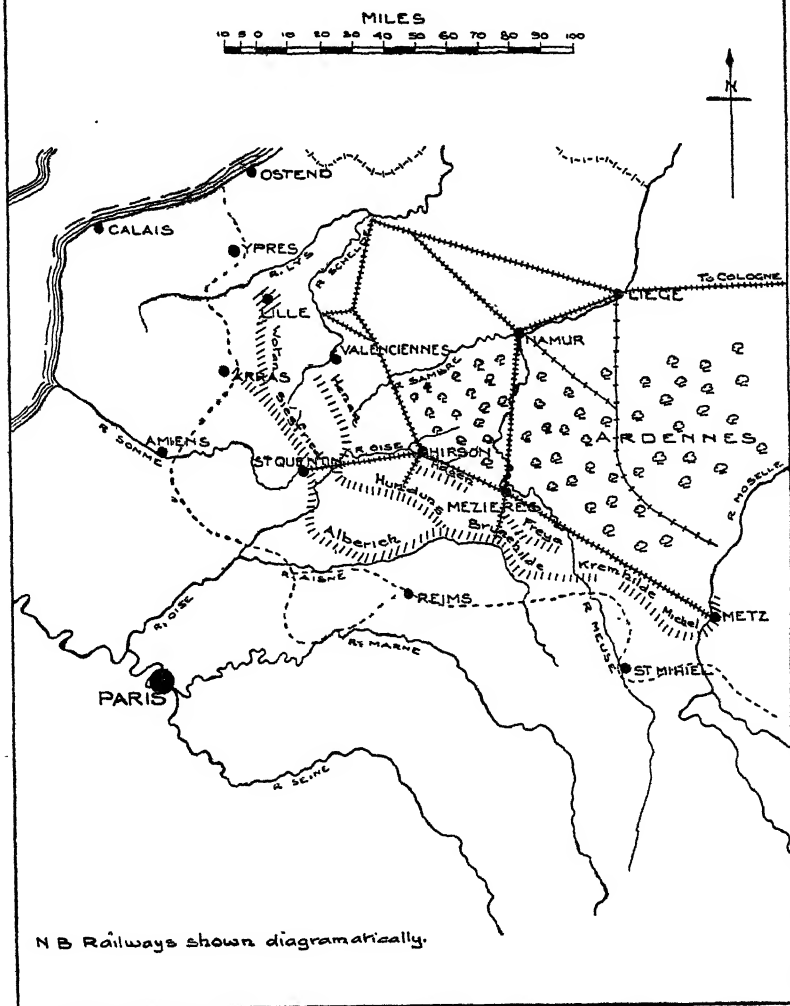
By his three blows Haig had in four weeks driven the German Armies across the whole vast blood-soaked area of the Somme battlefield, and had brought the British Army up to the Hindenburg Line.

To understand the strategic importance of the operations that now followed, it is essential to grasp the location of the railway systems, on which the German Armies in France and Belgium were dependent, and the nature of the defensive line which the Germans had prepared for their protection.

The whole of the railway lines which supplied the Germans ran through Liège, and then these lines diverged north-west to Malines, west to Namur, and south to the Ardennes, and eventually to Luxemburg. Of these, by far the most important was the line Liège-Namur. At Namur the system again diverged north-west to Brussels, west to Mons and south to Mezières. From Ghent a lateral line ran through Mons to Hirson and thence to Mezières and Thionville. Westward of this lateral line the railway system became a veritable network. Eastward of it there was no line available of sufficient capacity to support large bodies of troops, save the main lines noted above. The importance of the various railway junctions was thus obvious and vital.

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### GERMAN MAIN STRATEGICAL RLYS AND DEFENSIVE LINES 1918.



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The German trench zone was generally placed so as to cover perpendicularly their main line of communication. The name "Hindenburg Line" had been used by the Germans during 1916 for one line, and was retained by the British, but the Germans themselves had substituted names drawn from Norse classical mythology. The Wotan main line of German entrenchments behind the front line ran through Armentières, westward of Lille, Douai, St. Quentin and Laon, finally joining the front line of trenches at Rheims. Behind the Wotan line there ran a line from Ghent through Tournai, west of Guise, through Le Cateau, north of Laon, through Rethel, joining the front line at Verdun, and thence behind the St. Mihiel salient to Metz. This western line protected the lateral railway line Ghent-Mezières, and was called Hermann-Hunding-Brunhild line. Behind it there was a defensive line under preparation—but destined never to be completed—from Antwerp to the Meuse at Givet, and thence southward following the course of the river.

In front of the Wotan Line there were several smaller but very strong lines—the Drocourt-Quéant and the Aisne-Vesle line above the course of the Aisne.

The operations briefly described above had brought the British line up to the Wotan portion of the Hindenburg Line in front of St. Quentin and Cambrai. If the Wotan Line and the line behind it were pierced, the lateral railway between Mézières and Hirson would be exposed and the whole of the supply system of the German Armies to the south thrown into disorder. Further, the Germans, to avoid the interception of their supply line and route of retreat, would be forced to retire.

The great successes gained by the British Armies during August clearly showed that General Foch's original conception of a limited offensive to expose the enemy railway lines required expansion. Foch's plan was for the Americans, after the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient, to press due north towards the coalfields of Briey; while the French were to attack in Champagne; the British on the St. Quentin-Cambrai line, together with an Allied attack in Flanders to free the Coast.

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Haig had other views. It was now no longer a case of freeing the Allied railways, but of aiming a blow or blows at the railway systems on which the German Army depended. It was the moment for the *coup de grâce*. On August 27th he sent a letter to Foch (by Sir John Du Cane, the British representative at French Headquarters), urging him to press forward the American attack, but to amend the scheme so that the attack of the Americans and French should converge on Mezières, whilst he himself would thrust with all his might against the formidable Hindenburg Line. It was a vital alteration: the eccentric was to be made concentric. A definite strategic purpose was to be substituted for random blows.

On September 3rd\* Foch adopted Haig's suggestion; but even with the amendments it remained clear that the main operation was to be that of the British troops. If they succeeded there would be decisive victory; if they failed the lesser attacks—though they might seriously affect the Germans—could not enforce peace. Not only so, but Haig was well aware that the operation he was about to undertake was one of great hazard.

The most highly organized portions of the enemy's defences were in front of the British line. The British Army, severely handled in the great German attack, had had but one brief month of rest and reorganization, and had then been plunged again into a month of heavy fighting. It had incurred heavy losses, which in Haig's own words were "in proportion to the result achieved remarkably small, yet in the aggregate were considerable." Although his attack, if successful, might bring decision, if unsuccessful it would go far to revive the drooping moral of the Germans.

The responsibility was enormous, and he had to bear it alone. Again his Government sought to evade responsibility. The one power to whom a Commander-in-Chief should be able to look with confidence for help and support in a time of crisis once more refused to sustain and guide him, and left Haig to shoulder his heavy burden alone. On September 1st the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had

\* In his Directive 3537.

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telegraphed: "Just a word of caution in regard to incurring heavy losses in attack on the Hindenburg Line, as opposed to losses when driving the enemy back to that line. I do not mean that you have incurred such losses, but I know that the War Cabinet would become anxious if we received heavy punishment in attacking the Hindenburg Line without success."\* Although the telegram came from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, it could only have been sent with the cognizance of the War Cabinet. Haig never had a moment's doubt what it was intended to convey. The Cabinet were ready to meddle and interfere in his plans, but would not accept the responsibility for their own views. The implication was clear. If the attack succeeded, Haig would continue in his command; if it failed, he would be forthwith replaced. "What a lot of weaklings we have in London at the present time, and how ignorant," he said, "they are of the first principles of war."

Haig's own decision was definite, and once made he never faltered or hesitated. He had weighed all the circumstances and knew that the attack had a reasonable chance of success. He realized that to defer it would give the Germans time to reorganize and repair their line of defence. The attack must be delivered sooner or later, and if it were delayed would involve far heavier losses, with a diminishing chance of success. If Haig could not trust the resolution of the Government, he had boundless faith in the spirit and determination of his troops. On September 7th he issued an Order containing an appreciation of their achievements in the past and an appeal to "all ranks" to make the final effort and secure the fruits of the victory that their previous endeavours had placed within their grasp. The Order runs:

"One month has now passed since the British Armies, having successfully withstood all attacks of the enemy, once more took the offensive in their turn. In that short space of time, by a series of brilliant and skilfully executed actions, our troops have repeatedly defeated the same German Armies, whose vastly superior numbers compelled our retreat last spring. . . .

\* Wilson's "Life and Diaries," II., p. 145.

## THE FINAL BATTLES

"Yet more has been done. Already we have passed beyond our old battle lines of 1917, and have made a wide breach in the enemy's strongest defences. . . .

"In this glorious accomplishment all ranks of all arms and services of the British Armies in France have borne their part in the most worthy and honourable manner. The capture of 75,000 prisoners and 750 guns in the course of four weeks' fighting speaks for the magnitude of the effort and the magnificence of your achievement. . . .

"We have passed many dark days together. Please God, these will never return. The enemy has now spent his effort, and I rely confidently upon each one of you to turn to full advantage the opportunity which your skill, courage and resolution have created."

On the 9th September he paid a hurried visit to London to see the War Minister and to impress on him that the achievements of the British Army within the last months marked an unprecedented victory—the number of prisoners and guns which had been captured were unmistakable signs of the extent of the success. He urged that the end was now in sight. Energetic action must bring an early and victorious decision. Apparently the War Minister was not thoroughly convinced, for a few days later he was confiding to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff\* that he thought Haig "ridiculously optimistic," and he warned Haig that if he "knocked the present army about, there was no other to replace it," and added that his own military advisers considered that the decisive moment of the war would be July, 1919.

It is difficult to appreciate the responsibility which at this stage Haig assumed. By the definite instructions which he had received on April 3rd (p. 331) he was not only authorized, but directed, to decline to comply with orders from Foch which in his opinion would imperil his army. Even had he wished to take refuge behind any order which Foch had issued, or might issue, he was bereft of that safeguard. The Government at home and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff were plainly hinting that they did not wish him

\* Wilson's "Life and Diaries," II., p. 126.

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to attack the formidable entrenched line now in front of him, and had bluntly informed him that he was too "optimistic." Nor was Foch himself confident of success. On the day preceding the attack he had visited Haig and made no secret of his doubts. The whole responsibility thus rested on Haig, and to him alone must be ascribed the whole credit. With absolute confidence in his own judgment, with unflinching determination and that steadfast faith in God that was his mainstay, Haig resolved to commit his armies to the attack. No weightier decision has ever fallen to the lot of any British soldier, none had greater results.

A preliminary attack on September 18th by the III and IV Armies on a seventeen-mile front brought the whole British line within assaulting distance of the main German position. Every device evolved by human skill and military science had been utilized to make the belt of country some five to seven miles in depth which constituted the Hindenburg Line impregnable. The successive lines of trenches, constructed at leisure with unlimited labour, were protected by broad belts of barbed wire. Deep communication trenches connected them from front to rear. Numerous villages were studded over the area—and each village was a fortress. Woods and spinneys offered opportunities for a repetition of the determined resistance that had held up the Cambrai attack of the previous year. The German troops, demoralized though they might be by the blows that had been rained on them, had still the well-deserved reputation for determined and stubborn fighting. Great though their losses in artillery had been, the reply that they made to the British blow had shown that their contracting lines had enabled them to concentrate no mean supply of guns against the new threat.

All calculations pointed to the conclusion that in actual numbers the German forces were probably not inferior to the British Army which was about to assault their defences.

The plan was simple. In order to deceive the enemy the I and III Armies on the left were to attack before the main

## THE FINAL BATTLES

blow was delivered by the IV Army.\* If the plan was simple, the difficulties which faced the troops were immense. On the left the I and III Armies were confronted by the great Canal du Nord, with steep and high banks—at most of its course too deep to ford, its bridges destroyed, and impassable for tanks. On the centre and right the IV Army had immediately on its front the great entrenchment of the Hindenburg system.

On the 27th the I and III Armies advanced to the assault, the men of one division wearing lifebelts and carrying rafts which had been requisitioned from the Channel steamers. Thus provided, the indomitable infantry slid down the banks of the Canal, splashed their way through the water and clambered up the other side in face of the opposition of the German infantry and machine guns. Only at a few places did the ruins of a partially destroyed bridge enable some to cross dry-shod. By midnight they were firmly established on the enemy side of the river. Light bridges were rapidly constructed, and another day's fighting developed the situation sufficiently for the main assault by the IV Army to be delivered on the Hindenburg entrenchments on the 29th.

By the 30th September 35,500 prisoners and 380 guns were in our hands, and the whole of the Hindenburg Line was completely broken north of St. Quentin. Thirty British and two American divisions had driven thirty-nine German divisions from the strongest fortified line ever met in warfare. "Great as were the material losses," wrote Haig,† "the effect of so overwhelming a defeat upon a moral already deteriorated was of even larger importance."

Simultaneously with the great battle in the centre of the Allied line Foch had delivered blows at other vital points of the front. Immediately in front of Ypres the Belgian Army and the II British Army under the King of the Belgians

\* Throughout these great operations from August, 1918, onwards the British Armies were commanded as follows:

I Army.	—Lord Horne.
II	„ Lord Plumer.
III	„ Lord Byng.
IV	„ Lord Rawlinson.
V	„ Sir William Birdwood (who had succeeded Sir H. Gough).

† Despatches.



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drove a deep salient in the German line, and by the 30th they had regained all and more of the ground which had been abandoned in the spring, and passed the farthest limits reached in the Flanders battles of 1917. In the south the French and American Armies were gaining their victories.

The advance of the British Armies under Haig and the Belgian and British Army under the King of the Belgians had left the German line in a great and dangerous salient between Cambrai and Ypres, and Ludendorff ordered a general withdrawal.

While this was in progress Haig struck again on the 8th October with the whole weight of the I, III and IV Armies, and drove the Germans out of the last sections of the Hindenburg Line, and by the 10th October they were back to the river Selle. Four days later in another great blow the Belgian Army and the II British Army carried forward their line and captured Courtrai.

By the middle of the month of October the Germans were back to the line of the Scheldt, Selle and Aisne: the great industrial district of France was freed from the grip of the enemy and the Belgian coast was once more in Allied hands.

On the 17th October Haig was ready for another effort, and attacking with the whole of the I, III and IV Armies he had succeeded by the 25th in driving the enemy back from the line of the Selle. A week later (November 1st), on the same front he delivered the last and decisive blow of the war: advancing his line over 20 miles in ten days he seized the vital lateral communications of the Germans, and effectively severed the German Army into two great portions divided by the great natural obstacle of the Ardennes. The manœuvre which Ludendorff had tried to execute against the Allies in the spring was accomplished by Haig in the summer. The result which Haig had foreseen as early as December, 1917, should the Germans prove sufficiently ill-advised to commit their whole strength to an offensive against the Allies, had eventuated.

Throughout it had been Haig, and Haig alone, who had planned the operation, and the troops of the British Empire who had given effect to his plan.

## ALLIED ATTACKS JULY TO NOV. 1918.



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During these momentous days which changed the whole face of the war, Haig was tireless. He lived in the train. He was in constant touch with his Army Commanders. There were repeated personal interviews—often several each day. He left the details to those who had to carry out the task, but he kept strict control of the strategy. He never fussed or worried; but his finger was on every pulse, and his driving power and energy were behind each successive blow.

Imperturbable as ever, he showed no visible sign of the tremendous responsibility he was shouldering, or the strain to which he was subjected, save by that extra vicious tug of his moustache which was always a solvent for his troubled feelings. But there was never a sign of hesitation or of indecision. Enormous though the changes were in the course of the war, to Haig, almost alone in the Allied Armies, they did not come unexpectedly. His judgment was being justified in the only court to which he ever submitted it; his belief in Divine guidance was being confirmed.

When on the 11th November the bugle sounded the "Cease fire"—ringing the curtain down on the great drama—the line on which the British Armies stood passed through the town of Mons, where four long years before they had suffered the shock of the first German assault.

While these decisive battles were being fought and won at lightning speed in France, the Allied and Enemy Governments were not ignorant of the fact that the end of the war was approaching. On September 26th a Bulgarian envoy bearing a flag of truce had sought the British Headquarters in the Salonika area and sued for an armistice of forty-eight hours, to be followed by a peace delegation. Three days later a conference in Germany decided, at the instigation of Ludendorff, to open negotiations with America, and on October 1st even Hindenburg, under pressure of the British advance, demanded of his Government that they should treat immediately for an armistice.

Four days later the German note was despatched to President Wilson.

Throughout the whole world there was no longer any doubt as to the issue: the problem was the terms that were

## THE FINAL BATTLES

to be exacted from Germany as the price of peace. The interchange of political notes dragged a weary course throughout October, for the Governments were as unprepared for victory as they had been for war. They were tormented by doubt and indecision as to the wisest course to pursue.

Should they run the risk of further severe fighting in the hope that the Allied Armies would dictate peace in Berlin, or was Germany now sufficiently conscious of defeat to accept terms which would satisfy the just demands of her victors? If so, what were those terms to be?

On October 19th Haig was asked his opinion by the Prime Minister. He was now as little elated by success as he had been depressed by adversity. He had no desire for a Roman triumph, and it was with his usual dispassionate detachment that he analysed the factors of the problem set him by the politicians. He had ordered his troops to the slaughter of battle with ruthless determination when the situation required it of him, and of them. Now the one guiding consideration in his mind was whether the results of continued fighting would compensate for the further loss of British lives.

To the Prime Minister's question he replied by asking two questions, to which he himself gave his own answers.

Is Germany now so demoralized that she will accept any terms, even unconditional surrender?

If she refuses, are the Allies in a position to throw her back so rapidly that she will not be able to destroy roads, railways and property as she retires?

The answers which Haig gave to his own questions were that, though the German Armies were beaten, Germany's national pride was great, and she might fight a final battle of despair if humiliating terms were demanded of her. Even a beaten and demoralized enemy could offer some active resistance, and would impose delay on an advance. The difficulties of supply, already great, would be enormously enhanced as the victorious army advanced. And delay might enable Germany to rally further resources to her aid and reorganize her armies.

Already the British were providing, through the army organization, food for 800,000 of the civilian population of

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the liberated French districts. If fighting continued, bridges, railways and roads would inevitably be destroyed as the army advanced. An advance towards the German frontiers would entail immense loss of property and inestimable suffering to the inhabitants of the invaded districts of Belgium, France and Luxemburg.

Above all, if Germany did decide to make a last desperate resistance, the brunt of the fighting would continue to fall on the British Armies. Neither the French nor the American Armies were at this period capable of a decisive attack. The French Army had not been able to take any active share in the later stages of the fighting. The American Army, of magnificent personnel and great potential fighting power, was not yet fully organized; it was well equipped, but only partially trained, and possessed only an inadequate supply service, and its officers and non-commissioned officers lacked experience.

Even in the British Army, which, in his opinion, had never been more efficient than now, reinforcements were lacking, and effectives were diminishing.

It was Haig's considered opinion that while the British Army might be able to drive back the Germans to her frontiers and beyond, the advantages to be gained would not compensate for the great expenditure of British lives.

But the demoralization was eating deeper and farther into the heart of Germany than Haig realized. Her allies were falling away from her one by one: Bulgaria had already retired from the war; Turkey was being beaten to her knees. In Italy the British troops, under Lord Cavan, headed the onslaught of the whole Italian Army across the Piave, and the Austro-Hungarian Army finally collapsed. On November 4th an armistice was signed totally depriving the Dual Monarchy of any power of further resistance. The German Navy mutined. Revolution spread like wildfire through Germany, and on November 11th the Armistice was signed, which, if it did not impose unconditional surrender, was sufficiently exacting to lay Germany defenceless at the feet of her foes.

The invaded countries were to be evacuated forth-

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with, and the inhabitants and prisoners of war repatriated. Enormous quantities of the armaments without which a modern army is powerless, all submarines and the bulk of her navy, were to be surrendered. The railways were denuded of stock, the roads of motor transport, and, most decisive of all, the left bank of the Rhine was to be evacuated, and the river line pierced by the surrender of three bridge-heads on the right bank.

In his Despatch, in cold but incontrovertible phrases, Haig sums up the part which his armies had played in the final fight :

“ In three months of epic fighting the British Armies in France have brought to a sudden and dramatic end the great wearing-out fight of the past four years. . . . In the fighting since November 1st our troops had broken the enemy’s resistance beyond possibility of recovery, and forced on him a disorderly retreat along the whole front of the British Armies. Thereafter the enemy was capable neither of accepting nor refusing battle. The utter confusion of his troops, the state of his railways congested with abandoned trains, the capture of huge quantities of rolling stock and material, all showed that our attack had been decisive. . . . In the decisive contests of this period (August 8th to November 11th), the strongest and most vital parts of the enemy’s front were attacked by the British, his lateral communications cut and his best divisions fought to a standstill.

“ . . . This record is a proof also of the overwhelmingly decisive part played by the British Armies on the Western Front in bringing the enemy to his final defeat.”

It is characteristic of Haig’s whole outlook that he claimed no credit for himself and little for his staff. It is to “ All ranks ” that he attributes success.

“ It would be impossible,” he says, “ to devise a more eloquent testimony to the unequalled spirit and determination of the British soldier, of all ranks and services. We have been accustomed to be proud of the great and noble traditions handed down to us by the soldiers of bygone days. The men who form the Armies of the Empire to-day have created new traditions which are a challenge to the highest records of the

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past and will be an inspiration to the generations who come after us."

On the 1st December the 1st Cavalry Division passed over the frontiers into Germany at the head of the British Army. Eleven days later, Haig at Cologne watched his troops cross the bridges over the Rhine. He had completed his work as the Commander-in-Chief of the greatest and most successful Army that Great Britain, in all her chequered history, had ever sent into the fields of battle to uphold her honour and sustain her cause.

Honours fell thickly on him. Sir George Arthur records that a proposal by the Prime Minister to relegate Haig to a subordinate position in the welcome accorded to Marshal Foch was frustrated by the intervention of the Sovereign, and it was arranged that he should have a separate reception. Haig, with his Army Commanders, were summoned to London and given a great public ovation as they proceeded from Charing Cross to Buckingham Palace, where H.M. the King received them. At Marlborough House, Queen Alexandra, with Lady Haig, waited to greet the Commander-in-Chief. It was a fitting tribute to the Commander and the Army from the capital of the Empire which they had saved.

Hostilities were at an end, but peace had not yet been signed, and Haig returned to the Continent to remain in command of the troops until the long-drawn peace negotiations should end. It was not until July, 1919, that he finally gave up his command abroad, and returned to take over the duties of Commander-in-Chief of the Army in Britain. In his office at the Horse Guards he sat at the table which 100 years before had been used by the great Duke of Wellington.

On the 19th July, 1919, London once more assembled to do honour to the victorious armies, but in this national tribute Haig shared the honours with the rest of the Allied Commanders, and General Foch and General Pershing took their appointed places in the procession, but for the multitude the man of the moment was Douglas Haig.

Innumerable decorations were conferred on him. Foreign countries vied with one another in doing him honour. France, America, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, Japan, Serbia, Roumania,



*Photo · L.N.A.*

SIR DOUGLAS HAIG IN THE PEACE MARCH PROCESSION





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China, each gave him their highest orders. He was created Earl Haig, Viscount Dawick and Baron Haig of Bemersyde. The Sovereign conferred on him the Order of Merit—the highest order in his gift. His own countrymen in the House of Commons voted him £100,000.

The speech of the Prime Minister did scant justice to the services he had rendered. There was a grudging reference to “his tenacity of purpose, his dauntlessness in the face of what looked like disaster;” but the real emphasis was laid on the fact that he “had accepted the command of F.M. Foch over the British forces, which hitherto had been commanded by Sir Douglas Haig.” Those who knew the two men even by the glimpse afforded them through the severely censored newspapers of those years, perhaps best appreciated the correct application of the Prime Minister’s final phrase: “After all, modesty adds a cubit to the stature of the tallest man.”

A very brief speech of one of his own Staff Officers gave the House a clearer insight into the events preceding the vote, and perhaps affords some explanation of the inadequacy of the Prime Minister’s tribute. Sir John Davidson,\* who, as Haig’s Director of Military Operations on the General Staff in France, had been with him throughout the whole period of his command, curtly informed the House that “Sir Douglas Haig had hitherto refused to accept any honours until he saw that the men and officers were being properly and adequately treated.”

This brief statement records the issue of the first stage in the struggle which was to fill the remaining years of Haig’s life—the struggle to assure that those who, with him and under him, had shared in the burden of battle should not find themselves unduly handicapped in the life that lay ahead of them.

\* Major-General Sir J. Davidson, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., M.P. for Fareham.

## CHAPTER XXV

### LIFE AFTER THE WAR—THE BRITISH LEGION

FIFTY-EIGHT years of age, still in the prime of his manhood, in perfect physical and mental condition, the Army had nothing more to offer to Douglas Haig. His Field-Marshal's rank still kept him on the Active List, but there was no appointment that he could fittingly fill.

The grant from the Government, supplementing his Field-Marshal's pay and his private income, had given him reasonable wealth. He could, at his pleasure, have aspired to high office in other branches of the State service. The Generals who had commanded armies under him had already turned their eyes in that direction, and within a short space of time Lord Plumer was ruling Palestine, Lord Allenby Egypt, and Lord Byng was Governor-General of Canada. Haig's name was, indeed, mentioned for the appointment of Viceroy of India. But ambition for new distinction was at rest, and he did not feel it his duty to offer further services to the Government of his country. He longed for the joys of reunion with his family ; he craved for rest, and he could—if he so desired—look forward to long years of honourable ease and retirement.

Public engagements filled a portion of his time, since all the great cities of the kingdom were eager for the honour of inscribing his name on their lists of freemen. Faithful in all things, he recalled a promise made to Glasgow when, at a time when doubt was rife, that city had signaled its confidence in him through its chief magistrate—and Glasgow was the first of the great cities to number him among its burgesses.

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His own University conferred on him the honorary degree of D.C.L. The undergraduates of Scotland's oldest University—St. Andrews—had already elected him as their Rector in 1916, and in 1919 he made his rectorial address. He chose as his subject "Character ;" and if in literary merit his speech fell short of those of his successors—Barrie and Kipling—it made a deep impression on the students. Two years later he succeeded to the Chancellorship of the University, and the mace, which had not left Scotland for five hundred years, was carried behind him through the streets of London on the day of mourning.

The unveiling of war memorials made large demands on his time, for so far as was possible he never declined to perform these ceremonies. It was his own tribute to those who had fallen.

He overcame both his objection to and his lack of proficiency in public speaking, and, if never eloquent, he became adequate in this branch of service. His speeches were simple, clearly phrased, and in each one he liked to recall from the store of his personal experience incidents in the history of units connected with the locality in which he was speaking. Always he struck the same note of duty, self-sacrifice and service, and pleaded for assistance and sympathy for the ex-Service man, and for the dependents of those who had fallen.

Edinburgh claimed him again, and for a year he took up his residence there. The citizens of the Empire, by a public subscription, presented him, in 1921, with the home of the Haigs at Bemersyde, and as soon as the necessary alterations were completed he made it his permanent home. The planning of the garden and the completion of the work entailed in its formation afforded him keen pleasure. His guests, young and old, were set to work on it, and many hours each week the Field-Marshal, with men who had held destiny in their hands, could be seen in the shrubberies cutting down straggling foliage and making paths.

He entered into the social life of the neighbourhood. He hunted with the local pack of hounds, he played tennis and he played golf ; but most pleasant of all hours to him were the quiet hours with his family.

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His own study was high in the centuries-old Tower of Bemersyde, reached only by a steep spiral stone stairway round a central pillar, with a rope hanging vertically from the top as an assistance in the ascent. Up this Haig would run with the energy of a man in the early forties. The room was a museum of war memories. A flag taken from the Mahdi hung on one wall; there were trophies from South Africa, and the maps which he had had in France, and an ever growing number of gold and silver caskets held the illuminated "freedom" of all the great towns. The writing-table, rigidly neat and tidy, bore evidence to the orderly mind.

He employed no secretary. Every letter he received was dealt with promptly with his own hand. Even the remonstrances of his trusted friend and doctor, Colonel Ryan, failed to induce him to avoid this extra tax on his energy and strength. When one day he had spent the long hours of the evening and night writing with his own hand answers to well over two dozen appeals from ex-Service men, Colonel Ryan urged him to spare himself, or to allow Ryan himself at least a share in the work. "No," replied Haig, "a letter from me in my own handwriting means much to these poor fellows. It may help them in their struggle."

Business claimed a portion of his time and energy. He joined a few of the boards of great industrial undertakings, among others the Royal Bank of Scotland, an insurance company, and the Fife Coal Mining Co. He took a keen interest in the affairs of each—rarely missing a board meeting, and spending many hours studying the details of the various undertakings.

Religion, which had played so large a part in his life during the war, never became perfunctory. He associated himself with the work of the Church of Scotland, and joined the Kirk Session of St. Columba's, the great Scottish Presbyterian Church in London. He attended the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in the summer of 1919, and made the same appeal for unity in religion as in all other organizations with which he had dealings. The last of the rare occasions on which he was impelled to take his seat in the House of Lords was the Prayer Book Debate. On that day he went

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to record his vote in favour of the revision of the Prayer Book, proposed by the Church Assemblies, approved by the House of Lords, but ultimately rejected by the House of Commons. It was Haig's sense of discipline rather than any deep conviction on the merits of the new proposal that guided his action in supporting the recognized authority in the Church of England.

But these activities, extensive though they were, served only as a background for the real task to which he set his mind and gave his strength. He was the Founder of the British Legion. By his action he brought about the union of the various ex-Service organizations that had come into being immediately the war was over, while Haig himself was still on active service. The Chairman of the Legion, Colonel G. R. Crosfield, D.S.O., relates that when the Comrades of the Great War and the Federation of ex-Service Men, both large and growing bodies, were at loggerheads, the Comrades approached Haig and asked him to become their leader. He emphatically refused. He would not allow himself to be actively associated with any ex-Service organization that was quarrelling with another. He would become President if and when unity was achieved, and not before. Although there were at the time many ex-Service associations, all of them dealt primarily with the needs of the rank and file, and did not deal adequately with the claims of ex-officers and their dependents, and Haig's first step was to found an officers' association, amalgamating all the work for ex-officers into one organization. It was round this organization that, in the end, the others grouped themselves into the Legion as we now know it.

In season and out of season, throughout the whole country, he preached the doctrine of unity of "all ranks" who had served in the war. In a letter to Colonel Crosfield, dated February, 1922, he wrote: "I am doing all I can to get the ex-officers to take an interest in ex-Service organizations generally;" and eventually, when the Federation and the Comrades agreed to join in a common organization, the British Legion emerged, and he became its President. From that moment he was the prime mover in every branch of the

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work, and in due course he fashioned its activities into the great organization whose name is now a household word throughout the whole Empire.

He had characteristically clear-cut views as to its scope and its limitations. He insisted that it must abstain altogether from interference in politics. "Unity, comradeship and peace" were to be its goal as well as its motto. Sympathy, thoroughness and generosity were to be its guiding principles. Only a few months before his death, when the great Thames flood brought extreme suffering to some of the Legion, he wrote: "Help the sufferers most generously."

He recognized the danger of officialdom and bureaucratic methods cramping its work as it extended, and in a letter written on September 23rd, 1922, he said:

"As charitable organizations develop and their machinery becomes more systematized, so do they act 'according to Regulation' and lose sympathy with the unfortunates who need help. We must guard against this, and I think occasionally change the subordinates who interview the needy ones, replacing them by others who have more recently felt the pinch of poverty and can appreciate more the value of a kindly word."\*

But he still required efficiency from those who worked, even voluntarily, for the Legion. On one occasion a committee was considering the desirability of superseding one of the workers whose action had given cause for dissatisfaction. A member of the committee pointed out that the worker gave voluntary service. Haig rejoined: "But there is no reason we should trust a voluntary fool."†

As soon as the order and unity of the British Legion had replaced the chaos and bickering of the ex-Service organizations at home, he turned his attention to the overseas dominions of the Crown. In most, if not all, there was a reproduction of the situation that Haig had found at home: in each he succeeded in bringing into being a new organization conforming to and modelled on the British Legion at home, and he set the seal on his labours by founding the "British Empire Service League," which he described as "a mighty Federa-

\* † *British Legion Journal*, Memorial Number.

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tion to bind together all who served in the forces of the Empire during the Great War," and which H.R.H. the Prince of Wales has called "the biggest British organization that exists."

In his work for the ex-Service man Haig went far afield. He visited South Africa in 1921, and Canada in 1925. Though not so well known in Great Britain as the British Legion, the Empire Service League embodies all Haig's ideals for the ex-Service men's organization, and both in the policy which he outlined for its guidance and the objects which he set before it, the principles which ruled his own life are traceable. The policy was declared to be "Loyalty to King and Empire," and "Unity and development of the British Commonwealth," and its objects "to further and maintain the spirit of self-sacrifice which in the war inspired all ranks to subordinate their individual welfare to the interests of the common weal, and to perpetuate a spirit of comradeship and patriotism throughout the Empire."

To the appeal to employers for assistance in the employment of ex-Service men, Haig added a practical contribution of his own. To commemorate the anniversary of the Armistice he instituted an annual "Poppy Day" to raise money for the assistance of ex-officers and men by the sale of Flanders poppies. Every poppy sold on November 11th is the work of a disabled man in one of the Legion Factories, and nearly three hundred of these men have thus obtained regular employment.

Though the years had dealt kindly with him physically, and though he himself was unconscious of any change, those who knew him best, and who saw him only at intervals, noticed the marks that the passage of time was leaving on him. He was less alert, less abrupt. The barrier of reserve was still there, but it was markedly less pronounced than when he was in office. His criticism was more kindly, and his toleration broader and more sympathetic. His mind turned more to events of the past; at times he appeared to brood and commune with himself, and it seemed as if it was only by a conscious effort that he could recall his mind to the present day. He had lost much of his dislike of old age, and



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would talk of what he would be able to do if and when infirmity came to him. There was still that almost pathetic confidence in special diets. Sanatogen had given place to oranges. There was still that complete indifference to affairs that did not immediately concern him.

He delighted in meeting those who had served with him in the past, and he was at pains to seek opportunities of talking with them. Travelling in a train on the Continent, he used to ask the conductor for the names of others on the train, and if it numbered among its passengers an old comrade he would himself seek him out. He liked to discuss again the incidents of the war. To an old friend he said: "During the war I liked to see you, for you were almost the only man who then never talked of the war. Now I like seeing you, for you talk of the war to me with knowledge."

His thoughtfulness for others became very noticeable. Many trivial incidents are related showing his unaffected modesty and shyness. It was only in connection with his work for the British Legion that he was prepared to take a prominent position in any public function. He was happy to live his life unnoticed, confident of the place that he had won for himself in history. His advice was sought from time to time on military problems by successive Cabinets, and by the Committee of Imperial Defence, and to each of these he applied himself with his habitual thoroughness and care, nor was he ever at a loss for the same clear-cut and decided recommendations which had marked his official life. By a strange coincidence on the last occasion on which he examined an important military problem his attention was drawn to the same question which he had been called on to study in the first year of his service as Chief of the General Staff in India.

He never publicly gave expression to any extenuation or defence of his policy, nor did he ever authorize one word to be written in contradiction of accusations and criticisms levelled against him in the post-war flood of controversial literature. He appeared to watch with complete calm the gradual drawing aside of the curtain which had hidden and still partially hides many of the episodes of the war. His own record was preserved in his diaries, and in a very

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carefully prepared memorandum which he had drawn up. He would willingly show parts of the diary to those who had been associated with him in the war, and he even gave copies of the note to selected friends to study, but the publication under his own signature he reserved for posterity. He lent his diaries to the official historian of the war, saying, "I don't mind what you say of me provided you give the facts."

Lady Haig's health gave him anxiety during the years 1926 and 1927, and it was with the deepest joy that he welcomed her complete recovery in the late autumn of 1927. Once again she was able to take a full share in his activities and his sports, and with her he journeyed for the last time to London in January, 1928. Together, on January 28th, they attended the enrolment ceremony of the 20th Richmond (Earl Haig's Own) Boy Scouts. . It was fitting that it was to these lads, who were the sons of disabled ex-Service men employed at the British Legion Poppy Factory, that his last speech should be delivered and his last service done.

"I have come," he said, "to the enrolment ceremony, and have become the patron of the troop, because I wish to encourage the British Legion spirit in the rising generation. . . . It is essential that the young should be taught the meaning of Empire and the sacrifices that their fathers have made for it. . . . I ask you boys always to play the game and to try and realize what citizenship and public spirit really means. When you grow up always remember that you belong to a great empire, and when people speak disrespectfully of England always stand up and defend your country."

Two days later—on Sunday, January 30th—there came to him the swift sudden call, and his earthly life of sacrifice and public service came peacefully to an end. It was as he, above all, would have wished. There was no illness to be endured, no pain to be borne, no infirmity to realize the haunting dread of his early middle age.

He had been actively engaged during the day, and had been in the company of his wife, his sister and his brother. After dinner he had played cards. At 10 p.m. he said good

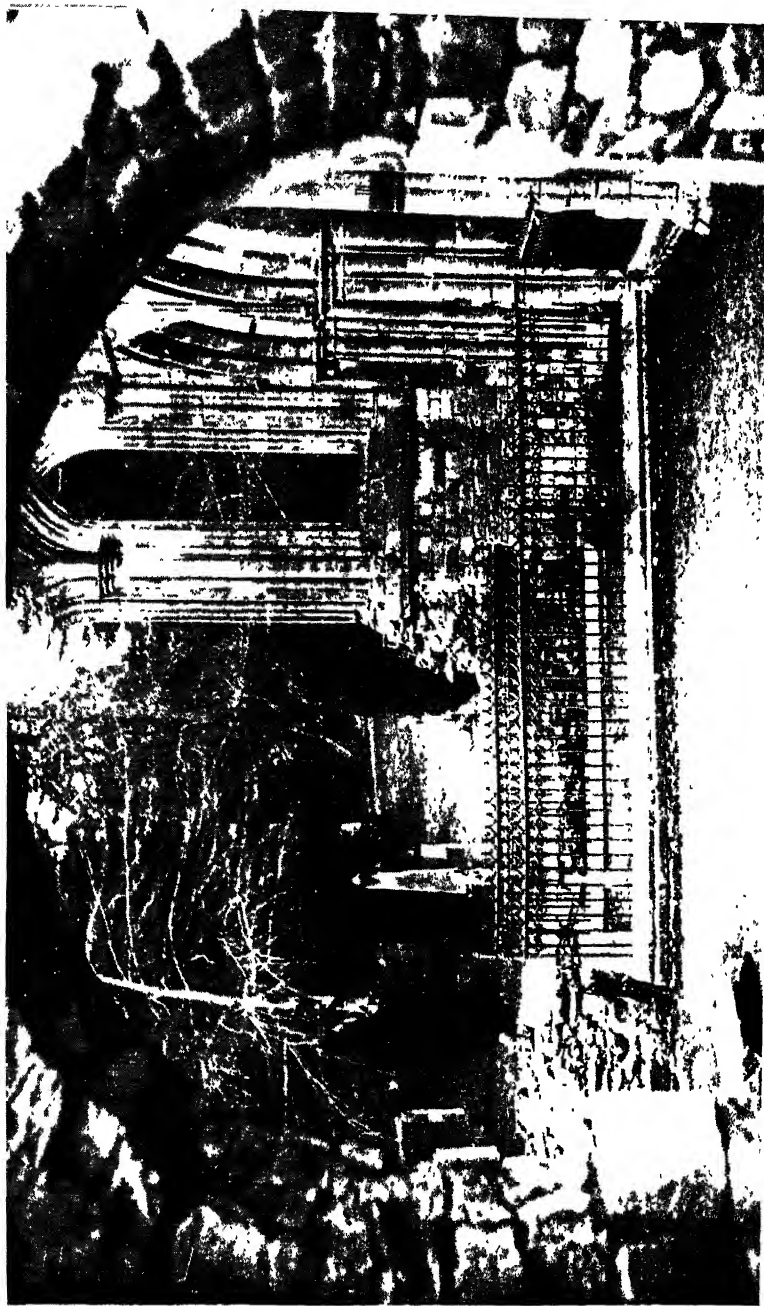
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night and went to his room. A few minutes later the sound of low moans coming from his room was heard. His brother, John Haig, hastened to the room and found him undressed, sitting on his bed, fully conscious, but gasping for breath. He did not realize that death was awaiting him. In a few moments all was over ; the brave heart which adversity had never conquered nor success quickened, had ceased to beat.

No one—least of all Haig himself—realized before his death how deep and world-wide was the appreciation of his services, or the genuine regard—almost reverence—in which he was held by all nations, nor how great a place his character had won for him in the hearts of his fellow-countrymen. From every foreign country, from friends and neutrals in the Great War, there came tributes. His own nation did homage as his body was borne through London and on the long journey to the resting-place which he had chosen for himself at Dryburgh Abbey, almost within sight of his home.

The short and simple, intimate service at St. Columba's, the march through London, the majesty and dignity of the service at Westminster Abbey, the midnight entry into Edinburgh, the passing—to the notes of the saddest of all dirges, the "Flowers of the Forest"—to St. Giles's Cathedral, and the latest stage of the journey on a simple farm wagon from St. Boswell's to Dryburgh, will remain for ever historic. But it is on the final service that memory will linger. The River Tweed, in brown spate, lapping the very borders of the Abbey precincts, the westerly sun piercing for a moment the grey and forbidding clouds, the wagon slowly winding its way along a narrow country road, through the bleak Scottish hills, crowded with reverent mourners, the voice of Professor Duncan, Haig's friend and padre, committing to its rest the mortal remains of his beloved leader.

There was no military pomp, no ceremony. Only the medals on the breasts of the men of the Legion who paid their last respects to their leader and the clear notes of the Last Post and Réveillé showed that Scotland's greatest gentleman and greatest soldier was at rest by the side of Scotland's greatest man of letters.



*Photo : Topical*

THE TOMB AT DRYBURGH ABBEY



## CHAPTER XXVI

### HAIG'S PLACE IN HISTORY

IT is only when all the facts are known that the final verdict can be given on the right of any man to the title of "great" in the best sense of the term. In spite of all the revelations from those who played prominent parts in the great struggle 1914-18, we are still far from full knowledge. All the nations who took part in the battles in France and Flanders are now preparing official histories. When these are published it may be possible to determine how far the great decisions taken were correct and incorrect, and to assess their effects upon subsequent events; but until that time there must be much that is only surmise, and any judgment can at best be tentative. The test of victory or defeat is not in itself conclusive. Lee and Jackson, though their cause was beaten, stand out as great leaders in the Civil War of America. Even Napoleon suffered final defeat.

While no final decision can yet be made, it is well that we who lived during these eventful years, and in whose minds many of the incidents are fresh, should place on record our views, and leave to posterity the task of forming judgments that will meet with final recognition.

The difficulties that have to be overcome are of greater importance in the estimate of achievement than mere results attained. War is not a controlled experiment: opportunities lost do not recur. The results that might have been obtained had other courses been followed, remain at the last vague and uncertain matters of conjecture. The difficulties which confronted the Allied leaders, Joffre, French, Foch, Haig, Robertson, Pershing, Pétain, and Nivelle, were

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widely dissimilar—if not indeed totally different—from those against which Moltke, Falkenhayn, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had to struggle, and any attempt at comparison between the merits of one group, or any individual in it, and its opponents, would be idle. Even between members of the same group comparison is difficult and invidious; but it is courted, indeed almost forced, by the numerous personal disclosures of their inmost intentions made by the various leaders, which succeed one another in ever increasing numbers with the passage of the years.

We measure a man of Haig's calling, a leader in war, by testing his appreciation of historic facts, by the accuracy of his forecast of events deduced from them, and the suitability of the means which at each successive step he adopted to meet the constantly changing circumstances. We place to his credit every opportunity taken, we count against him each chance lost.

How does Haig's leadership stand such a test? That he foresaw the war and prepared himself for it is of small importance. War is not initiated by soldiers: the events that lead to war are not the concern of soldiers. They are the onlookers. It is their duty to warn the statesmen of such indications as may reach them of military preparations in other countries, and they have the task of foreseeing the initial stages of the conflict. To them falls the work of computing for the information of the Government the relative military resources of the various countries, and theirs is the duty of perfecting, within the limits of the means placed at their disposal by the civil power, the machine with which the war will be waged.

In the years of peace that preceded 1914 Haig took his full share in each of these spheres of work. The organization of the Army in the Field was resultant largely upon his work at the War Office, when, under Lord Haldane's guidance, the drafts in the military manual were drawn up, initiating the system of staff work, which, with little change, enabled the vast armies of the Empire to act with the precision of a great industrial enterprise.

With Lord Kitchener alone among the great soldiers,

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Haig shared the foresight that anticipated and welcomed the grafting into the military organization of the great civilian enterprises.

In the training of the Army in pre-war days he had been conspicuous, and the work which he did at Aldershot in the years 1911-14 carried on and perpetuated the work of his predecessors in the great British military hierarchy, and resulted in the I Corps arriving on the field of battle incomparably the finest military unit for its size among all the armies of Europe.

When the opinion of all leaders, both civilian and military, not only in our own country, but so far as is known in all countries, anticipated a short war, Haig's prescience and accurate gauging of the military resources of the nations enabled him almost alone to foresee the severity of the struggle, and its inevitable duration through a long period of years instead of months. His assertion was no kind of blind guess-work: no man ever guessed less than Haig. It was the result of careful and laborious study and a deliberate weighing of every known factor.

It may well be that Lord Kitchener by a different process arrived simultaneously at the same conclusion: no one can now say; but it is at least established that it was Haig who first gave definite and responsible utterance to the view, and who urged it upon Lord Kitchener, before Kitchener had expressed his own opinion. That the two greatest soldiers of their time in Britain should indeed arrive simultaneously at the same opinion in these early stages would be in no way very remarkable. Their minds—even though they approached every problem from a different angle, and by a very different process—again and again arrived at the same conclusion. The historian of the future may indeed marvel that this prescience as to the protracted course of the struggle was not shared by other soldiers of all countries, who had equal—if not indeed easier—means of access to the available data on which they might form their considered judgments.

It may well be that this clearly conceived opinion both of the probable nature as well as of the duration of the war



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enabled Haig to view with complete equanimity (which surprised even those who knew him best) the various fluctuations of fortune in the initial stages of the war.

War has long passed the stage when the peculiar gifts of energy and will power of one man can mould the movement of armies, or compel success. The struggle is no longer between armed forces only, but between the whole power of contending nations. It is easy to conceive of cases in which victory on the field of battle might not result in the attainment of the end for which the victorious force had been armed. The final test of victory is the subjection of the "will to fight" of the enemy nation.

Yet it is equally certain that without defeat in the field of battle there is no possibility of a proud and determined people accepting at the victor's hands unfavourable terms of peace. The issue for which the nations were fighting during 1914-18 was too vital to leave much hope that without decisive defeat either side would lay down arms and surrender all hope of attaining its ends.

A compromise peace was obtainable at many periods, but such a peace would be but a pause—not an end to the struggle. Here then lay the core of the problem of "Eastern" and "Western"—whether to discomfort Germany without inflicting decisive defeat, so that she would give way and accept a compromise peace; or beat her to her knees and dictate terms of peace when her army lay stricken, and the will of the nation to fight on was weakened.

With the decision between these two conflicting policies for the conduct of the war, Haig had no immediate concern. In the "Manual of Field Service Regulations," which he had prepared in his year of work at the War Office long before the war, it had been definitely laid down that it was the duty of the Government with its responsible military advisers to decide on the task which the Army in the Field had to accomplish; and at no time was Haig the responsible military adviser of the Government in this wider field of world strategy. Nevertheless, his opinion was frequently asked, and he had no doubt in his own mind as to the correct advice for the military adviser to tender to the Government. In common

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with all the great soldiers of the time in Britain—with the possible and spasmodic exception of Henry Wilson—he was convinced that only by direct attack on the German main armies could victory be gained, and he was also convinced that such a victory was within the power of the Allies.

From the first day of the war Haig took his place as a leader of troops in the Field. No share of the responsibility for the somewhat fantastic schemes which were from time to time attempted by the Government can fairly be laid to his charge. The measure of praise or blame for them must be apportioned between the successive War Cabinets or Committees—by whatever names they were called—and their respective responsible military advisers. It can, however, be safely said that on all the main issues his views were in close accord with those of Sir William Robertson.

During the first sixteen months of the war Haig was in the position of a subordinate leader, although the course of events led to the troops under his command undertaking all the important operations of the British Army in France.

The immediate problem in August, 1914, was one to which Haig himself had devoted the whole of one of his training Staff Tours in India in 1911, which he had himself defined as: "The operations of an army, whose communications are seriously threatened by an enemy who has out-manceuvred it, seeking relief either by risking a decisive battle under unfavourable conditions, or, as in the present case, by a rapid withdrawal in the hope of regaining the initiative."

Haig had designed this Staff Tour three years before the war, because at the time he had foreseen that in the event of the British Army finding itself on the left flank of the French Armies at war with Germany, it was one not unlikely to occur.

In a Staff Tour a year before he had at the final conference pronounced to the officers words that recurred often to the minds of those who were with him then and were still with him in the anxious days of 1914-18.

"We must all agree with Clausewitz, Langlois and Bonnal, and a host of other educated soldier-writers, that the spirit is the essential: without it every plan will fail miserably, with

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it any plan has a very fair chance of success. We are all bound to make mistakes when in command and to be in desperately critical situations at times, but our only chance of eventual success lies in resolution and the will to conquer.

"We end where we began; it is the spirit that quickeneth, the spirit that gives victory. When it was urged that Confucius had said nothing in regard to the conduct of war, it was pointed out by one of his disciples that, on the contrary, he had summed up the whole philosophy of war in five words; these were: 'If I fight, I win.'

"Whether the story is true we know not, but it may well be, for these five narrow words contain the whole metaphysics of combat. The man who does not go into action determined to win, that is, to destroy his enemy, goes into it half beaten."

The Battle of the Aisne, the Battle of Ypres, the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, and the Battle of Loos—if these alone had stood to his credit—would have justified comparison between Haig and Stonewall Jackson. There was the same accurate appreciation of tactical possibilities, the same thoroughness of preparation, and the same unbending will, and tenacity that concentrated on the final goal—to win.

Although in independent command of the British forces during 1916, he still could claim only to influence—not to control—the strategy. As he himself said in 1915, he looked to Joffre to indicate the strategical conception of the Allied operations; but he was in full accord with Joffre's proposals, and the Battle of the Somme originally conceived as a joint Allied effort became by force of circumstance a British battle. That it so nearly achieved final success was due to Haig's leadership.

The Calais Conference definitely deprived Haig temporarily of a voice in the Allied strategy in the Field, but by May, 1917, he found himself practically in sole control of a difficult, even critical situation. The great French attack had failed; the French Army was for the time being out of action. Dangerous mutinies had sprung up in the French ranks. France itself was showing signs of disquieting vacillations.

Great Britain was more than anxious about her sea com-

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munications. The Battle of Arras—brilliant local success though it had been—had been waged as part of the Nivelle scheme. It had no strategic object in itself: it led nowhere. The Germans had constructed the formidable Hindenburg Line opposite the southern portion of the British line. To attack it with the resources at Haig's disposal would have been not only unsound but disastrous. There could be practically no hope of success, and the strong fortress line could have been held with comparatively few enemy troops, while a great blow was delivered against the French. On the other hand, in Flanders there was an opportunity of striking at vulnerable and important enemy communications. If this venture were successful the Coast would be freed and the sea communications of Great Britain greatly strengthened.

The Germans could not avoid this attack by a retirement. They must fight. Haig, in spite of contrary opinions entertained by those at home, even by Robertson, had correctly assessed the effect on the Germans of the great Somme battle of the previous year. Time was short, the season far advanced; if the weather held there was the probability of great strategic results.

There was at least the certainty that the Flanders attack would have the immediate result of relieving the pressure on the French. There followed the battles of Messines, Passchendaele and Cambrai.

It may be that Haig's decision to delay the attack from the 25th July was an opportunity lost. If so, it was a miscalculation of that most important but least calculable factor—the weather. It is quite certain that his decision to press the attack in Flanders to its utmost extent was correct policy.

The continuance of the Battle of Passchendaele has been the most criticized of the incidents of Haig's leadership. The most violent criticism is perhaps that of Mr. Winston Churchill. It is sufficient to say that that decision was justified—even inevitable—owing to the necessity of the time.

It is in the fateful months of the Spring and Summer of 1918 that Haig's leadership stands out, and marks him for all time as a great master of war. He had given warnings that

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were clear and unmistakable of the blow that was about to fall on the British Army. Not only had the reinforcements for which he had asked been refused him, but his force had been reduced in strength and was below establishment even of this reduced strength. In spite of his protests the extent of line which he had to hold had been increased. For that the sole responsibility must rest with the British Government. He had defined the time, place and the nature of the German attack, and had added the testimony of his French colleagues. He had been right ; but his judgment had been once more overruled by the Civil Government.

By consummate and determined leadership, and by the endurance and fighting power of his troops, he had prevented the greatest of the German efforts from breaking the line.

Then, to his amazement, he found that the French Commander-in-Chief was about to undertake a manœuvre which would result in the recurrence in even more extreme form of the danger so recently averted.

For the first time in the whole war a false move appeared about to bring the defeat of the Allied Armies within the bounds of possibility. He had little reliance in the British Cabinet or in their military adviser. With characteristic sane, calm judgment he measured the danger, and saw the only means of averting it, and, with self-abnegation unparalleled in military history, he took steps to save the situation, even though these measures meant the sacrifice of his own independence.

Sensitive though he always was to praise, Haig would not then, or ever afterwards, accept any measure of praise for this action. When millions of men were putting their lives to the hazard, he would have scorned any man who valued his own position, however honourable, so highly that he would not sacrifice it willingly for the sake of his country's cause. Men of less noble mould will give him honour for his action. It met the pressing need of the moment. It gave time for the depleted armies to recover, and, as if Providence in its eternal justice would not demand of any more than is right, it led to a position in which Haig

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himself within a few months was to direct the battles which marked the final victory.

Within twelve weeks Haig, with his army renewed, re-organized, and for the first time amply and fully supplied with munitions, was issuing orders for the first great blow. Later he was warning Foch that the moment to strike and strike hard had come. It was he who supplied to the Generalissimo the conception of the final attack which was incorporated in the order to all the armies. It was Haig who, when warned by his own Government that they would not support him if his judgment erred, and when even Foch himself shrank from the responsibility of ordering the attack, took on his own shoulders without any hesitation the whole load, and launched the attack which shattered the great Hindenburg Line, bared the German communications, and laid open to his armies the country that stretched to the frontier and to Germany itself.

It was Haig, and Haig alone, who, when Foch was still planning his campaign for 1919, when the responsible military advisers in London were telling the Cabinet that July, 1919, would be the critical time in the war, when the War Minister himself was calling the Commander-in-Chief "ridiculously optimistic," with complete confidence in his own careful judgment of the circumstances, definitely foresaw the result and designed and delivered the blow.

Judged by the test of correct estimation of the facts and accurate forecasts, there would not appear to be any event or crisis in which Haig's judgment on the military requirements was at fault—with the sole possible exception of Cambrai.

Nor is it possible to point to an occasion in which the measures which Haig took to meet the circumstances with which he was confronted by the enemy in the field of battle were faulty or inadequate.

Criticism in the future may take the form of hypothesis—that had he adopted other measures greater results would have been achieved, or that the same result might by other methods have been achieved at lesser cost. Such criticism

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is both valid and valuable, if it is supported by sound arguments and careful consideration of all the facts ; but it can safely be said that during the ten years that have elapsed since the war it has not yet been justified.

Nor does the claim that Haig inspired as well as executed the great blows that in 1918 brought the fruits of victory to the work of previous years involve any disparagement of General Foch. Had the position been reversed the results would in all human possibility have been very similar. Haig, with the four years of close and intimate knowledge of the relative fighting values of his own army and that of the Germans, knew as no one else could know how strong was the chance of success when he made his great decision.

It was common knowledge to both commanders—as indeed it was to almost all who were in a position to judge—that in 1918 it was the British Army alone which could undertake a great offensive against the Germans. The French nation, with smaller resources both in men and material than the British Empire, had fought itself to a standstill. The American Armies were as yet undeveloped and untrained. If victory was to be won, it was by the British Army that the blow must be struck.

The Germans were under no delusion. They had moved their troops to meet the threat. It was no great strategical conception that made the fighting of the Autumn of 1918 take a course so different from that of previous years. If the strategy of any one man was responsible it was the strategy of Ludendorff in launching his great attack in March, which decided the fighting in August and September.

As Haig expressed it in his final Despatch :

“Neither the course of the war itself nor the military lessons to be drawn therefrom can properly be comprehended, unless the long succession of battles commenced on the Somme in 1916 and ended in November of last year on the Sambre are viewed as forming part of one great and continuous engagement.

“To direct attention to any single phase of that stupendous and incessant struggle and seek in it the explanation of our success, to the exclusion or neglect of other phases—possibly less striking in their immediate or obvious consequences—is in my opinion to risk the formation of unsound doctrines regarding the character and requirements

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of modern war. . . . In former battles this stage (the wearing down period) has rarely lasted more than a few days, and has often been completed in a few hours. When Armies of millions are engaged, with the resources of great Empires behind them, it will inevitably be long. It will include violent crises of fighting which, when viewed separately and apart from the general perspective, will appear individually as great indecisive battles. . . . The launching and destruction of Napoleon's last reserves at Waterloo was a matter of minutes. In this World War the great sortie of the beleaguered German Armies, commenced on the 21st March, 1918, lasted for four months, yet it represents a corresponding stage in a single colossal battle. . . . If the whole operations of the present war are regarded in correct perspective, the victories of the summer and autumn of 1918 will be seen to be as directly dependent upon the two years of stubborn fighting that preceded them."

If there was one characteristic generally attributed to a great leader in war which Haig lacked, it was the power of gaining the personal affection of the men of the armies he commanded. That came later when he set his seal on his life's work by the efforts he made for his comrades during the years that succeeded the war. But neither before nor during the war did he gain the devotion which had been so freely bestowed by the British Army on Lord Roberts. Nor indeed did Haig ever make any effort to secure it. The Army admired Haig; its officers and men trusted him implicitly, but they did not love him. He had no nickname with the men, nor with the officers as a whole.\* To those who were closest in touch with him he was "D. H."; and those a little less intimate knew him as "The Chief," but to the Army at large he was "Haig."

He had no fund of small talk. He rarely spoke to the men, except to put a purely official question. He would ask about their food and their billets, but these were the type of questions to which the men were already accustomed from inspecting officers. Seldom, if ever, did he try to strike a more personal note. On one occasion indeed, on the urgent representations of his Staff, he did make the attempt, and asked a somewhat elderly man in the ranks: "And where

\* The suggestion was often made that he was widely known as "Duggy" to the Army, but this is quite incorrect.



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did you start the war?" The reply, "Nowhere, sir; I didn't start the war," effectively checked any repetition of the effort.

If they did not love him, the respect in which the Army held Haig amounted almost to veneration. The men in the ranks felt, through that strange instinct that unites leader and led in times of grave peril, that the load that Haig was bearing was heavier, though so different from their own. They admired the spotless turn-out: the grave, somewhat stern face, with the massive chin, was to them symbolic of the essence of a great leader.

The stories of his absolute indifference to personal danger passed rapidly through the Army. The note that he always struck of "Endeavour" or "Sacrifice" or "Duty" found a ready response in the heart of the Army.

These were the attributes which he brought with him to his task—a deep knowledge of every phase of the art and science of war, which enabled him both to discern with almost unerring accuracy the probable intentions of the leaders opposed to him, and at the same time to gauge correctly both the possibilities and the limitations of the various plans of operation proposed by himself and by others for the British force; a cool and level judgment which was never disturbed in its operation by circumstances however unexpected—whether favourable or adverse; an unswerving and unhesitating will which bent to its purpose every physical and mental faculty with which he himself was endowed, and which enabled him to exact from all who served under him the uttermost they could give: an integrity and singleness of purpose which enabled him to stand aloof and impregnable in the welter of intrigue which diverted to purposes less worthy so much of the energies of others in high places; and these attributes gained the warm personal affection of everyone coming daily in contact with him and the confidence and trust of the Army as a whole.

As the drama of war unfolded he was from time to time accused of undue optimism—of underestimating the fighting qualities and resources of the enemy, or of placing too high a relative value upon the capacity of his own armies. Yet in

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each particular, so far as it can be tested by the knowledge now becoming available, his judgment was correct.

Critics with incomplete knowledge of the limitations imposed upon military operations by factors beyond human control have taxed him with lack of vision. There was probably no course advocated by any one of them which fell even within the most remote bounds of practical possibility which he had not already carefully considered, weighed in the balance and rejected. Only those in closest touch with him realize even now how far afield his mind ranged to probe the possibilities of alternative courses before he gave his final recommendations.

He was accused at one time of allowing himself to be unduly swayed by his Staff. To anyone with any knowledge of the man the suggestion can only appear ludicrous. There was no individual either on his Staff or elsewhere to whom Haig would—even in unimportant particulars—subordinate his own judgment.

In a task as immense and complex as that of the command of more than a million men in the field of battle much had necessarily to be left to the Staff, and the Staff spared no effort to relieve their Chief of unnecessary labour, and to lighten the load that rested on him: yet the chain of responsibility was such that no important decision could be made without his knowledge. Not a single member of Haig's Staff would have ventured to usurp a fraction of the duty of vital decision, nor would Haig himself have suffered for a moment any infringement of his own prerogative.

It has been suggested that he allowed personal friendship to influence him both in the matter of appointments and in the retention of officers. Friendship in the ordinarily accepted sense of the term was almost unknown to Haig. He gained, but he rarely reciprocated, the affection of others. It may safely be said that in no appointment which Haig made, either during the war or in the ten years preceding it, did personal affection, or any consideration other than that of suitability for the work, ever weigh with him for an instant.

On the other hand, he was in no way ruthless. He had a keen sense of the liability to error in human beings. He

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never forgot or left out of consideration the complete record of a man's work. A single error of judgment did not decide an officer's fate. The whole career, so far as it was known, was balanced in his mind, and a decision once made was pursued unflinching.

As one examines the history of Haig's decisions and actions throughout the war, there does not appear to be a single case of importance in his leadership of the Army, in the course which he adopted, in the plans which he formed, or in the methods whereby he gave execution to his plans, in which it is possible to say that Haig's judgment was at fault or his action in error. Judged by this test, it may fairly be anticipated that when the final record is written, the final judgment given, Haig will stand out alone and without rival as the greatest of the great soldiers who led the armies of their country to battle in the gigantic conflict waged in France and Belgium.

It would serve no useful purpose to seek to compare him with the great British soldiers of previous wars. Not one of them was faced by a task comparable with that of Haig's. Apart altogether from the conditions under which modern war is waged, the difference in the size of the armies makes any comparison impossible. Wellington at Waterloo commanded 67,000 men; the battlefield covered 5 miles. In the great battles of 1918 Haig had under his orders 1,000,000 men, and the front in which battle was joined extended over 128 miles.

Even should the final judgment of history deny to Haig supremacy among the great soldiers of the World War, his memory as a great man and a great patriot will be for ever enshrined in the hearts of his fellow-countrymen. If the British Empire admires ability and genius, it pays an even higher tribute of respect to rectitude, and Haig embodied each and every attribute by which men's characters are appraised—an unimpeachable integrity; a selfless devotion to duty and an unbending adherence to principle; an honesty of purpose that enabled him to watch unmoved and unaffected the petty self-seeking squabbles and bickerings of lesser men; and a courage and determination that enabled him to carry

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for three years a load of responsibility unparalleled in the history of his country.

Above all, he had such sympathy with the sufferings of his comrades in arms as led him—loaded with honour and weary with toil—to devote the remaining years of his life to an unrelenting effort to relieve the hardships of those who had, through the service of their country's cause, met with bitter misfortune. It was loyalty to such as these that led him to refuse all honours for himself until some fuller measure of justice had been done to those who had suffered.

All these are the qualities which endear his memory, not merely to the British Empire, but to all men and women the whole world over for whom virtue has not lost its claim and to whom courage makes appeal.

Yet, if indeed Haig was present in the spirit during the last scenes, when every head was bowed and every knee was bent as his mortal remains were borne from the Scottish Church of St. Columba's to Westminster Abbey, and thence to St. Giles's, and finally laid to rest by the banks of the Tweed almost within sight of his own beloved Bemersyde, he was pleading that the homage that was being paid to him should find expression in sympathy for and assistance to "All ranks" of the Army which he had loved and led to victory.



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